GENIUS *and* DISASTER

JEANNETTE MARKS

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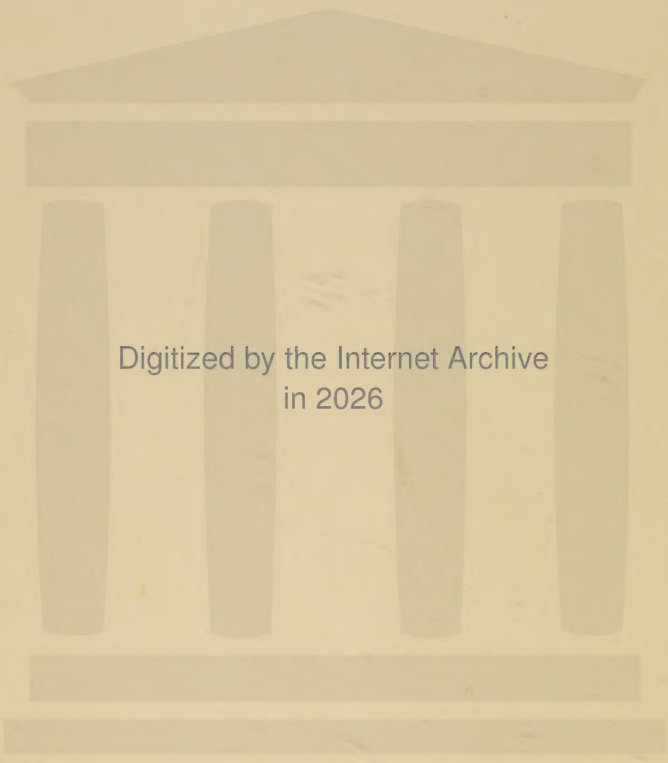
GENIUS AND DISASTER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Genius and Disaster

Studies in Drugs and Genius

BY

JEANNETTE MARKS

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

For John Burroughs microbes were "the little people." For physicians, bacteriologists, scientists of all kinds, they are bacteria. . . . The theory of toxemia as a motivating force in creative work antedates the brilliant work of Jacobsen's *Tuberculosis and the Creative Mind,* Gould's *Biographical Clinics,* Morris's *Microbes and Men.* And before Chambard wrote *Les Morphinomanes* or the late Dr. Oscar Jennings of Le Vesinet, Paris, did his research studies in the *Morphia Habit,* or Dr. Crothers of Hartford studied inebriety in all its forms or Dr. Pettey wrote his *Narcotic Drug Diseases and Allied Ailments,* or Dr. Terry published his pamphlets from Jacksonville, Florida, or Dr. Ernest Bishop of New York made his investigations, men were beginning to think about the relation of alcoholism and drug addiction to creative work.

The economist, too, is doing far-reaching work along drug lines. Economically the ablest book published is Ellen La Motte's *The Opium Monopoly.* That concerns itself chiefly—perhaps too much—with British responsibility for the present situation which has become international. For years, although my

interest in drug addiction has been the study of its phychology and not its sociological and economic history, I have kept a drug clipping book. I have only to page through that to see what is happening: London's opium dens; China's struggle to be freed; Britain's barring of opium in the British Isles (beautiful distinction in her home policy!); opium smuggled in automobiles over our boundaries; the connivance of some of our government officials in San Francisco to smuggle in opium by way of the Pacific; opium used at Sing Sing; drug laundered into shirt; drug in prisoner's food; drug evil stopped at Deer Island; open sale of opium; doctors addicted to drugs; state to take hold of evil; what is the drug fiend to do; testing the drug act; doctors protest drug law dangers; effect of war on consumption of narcotic drugs; drug victim tells of quest for cure; etc., etc. I have paged through a few columns of a big book two inches thick and packed from cover to cover with current information about the opium problem. . . . It does very little good for the newspapers to publish news items which are socially serviceable if in the same issues they perpetuate drug addictions by advertising the nostrums of the patent medicine business. If editors are lacking in social imagination, then let them, tongue in cheek, consider not the lilies of the field, but the toiling patent medicine manufacturer who for the

benefit of the public consumes the larger proportion of all opium produced!

Very often similar ways of thinking, as well as art forms, are all at once "in the air" so to speak, and different men following different paths, with no possible contact with one another, arrive at the same conclusions. The history of science shows this (for example, Darwin's *Origin of Species*); and the history of poetry shows it, too. Watts-Dunton in his essay *Poetry As An Energy and As An Art* is by no manner of means the first in the "energy" field. . . . With regard to pathology and literary criticism it would not be possible to study the books I have mentioned and not be indebted to them. My gratitude is here recorded and in especial to one who was my friend up to the day he died, Dr. Oscar Jennings. Just at present the psycho-analyst in drug addiction is assuredly not ignoring the bacteriologist. The psychical element as a factor in disease is a theory—a fact, if you will—written about patiently and persistently by many scientists. And in drug-addiction the hardest fight of all for release is the psychiatrical. The studies of the psychologist are fundamentally important to the study of drug addiction.

The whole subject of the relation of society to disease is one that is in the air to-day,—a subject belonging quite as much to social economics as to medi-

cine, and even more to those sciences than to any literary problem. The subject is too big, the debt too manifold, for it to remain the property of any one. It is the property of society. And in this spirit I give my limited studies to the public, hoping to do my share towards arousing wider general interest, towards the founding of a sounder literary criticism and the raising of a higher standard of social economics.

Attic Peace,
South Hadley, Massachusetts.

TO THE MEMORY
OF
MARIA CLEMM
WHOSE LOVE FOR HER CHILDREN
VIRGINIA CLEMM POE AND EDGAR ALLAN POE
HAS TURNED POVERTY, TRAGIC SUFFERING, EARLY DEATH
INTO AN INHERITANCE OF BEAUTY FOR ALL THE WORLD

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I

DRUGS AND GENIUS

I

DRUGS AND GENIUS

"Do what thou wilt, thou shalt not so,
Dark Angel! triumph over me;
Lonely, into the Lone I go;
Divine, to the Divinity!"

LIONEL JOHNSON.

SOME one boasted to Dr. Marston that he had cured a certain writer of his tendency to alcoholic over-indulgence. "It is a pity," replied Dr. Marston, "for he has never written a line worth reading since then." . . . But this tendency towards intemperance is not the exclusive specialty of the brain worker and in particular of the writer or artist. It is deep-seated in the instincts of the human race, and, it might be said, in sheer animal vitality. All savages discover and cherish some form of intoxication. Children invent intoxication in their games, such as whirling until they are dizzy. Mexico has already produced one demoralizing narcotic called peyote. How long-lived, as well as deep-seated, the instinct for intoxication is may be gathered from the fact that peyote has been identified with the Aztec

narcotic called "Sacred Mushroom" and with the "Devil's Root" of ancient Mexico. It is not possible to go so far back that there will not be evidence of this instinct at work. It crops out in race expression as well as in the individual. It is part of all race experience. Love is an intoxication from which some never recover and some never wish to recover! Crowds, mobs, loud noises, music, sculpture, the theater, politics, cold baths, all produce exhilaration, all break down the inhibitions and give the illusion or the reality of a larger life.

A man exhilarated gets his "second wind" in things intellectual, things spiritual,—that is, he is capable of energy, and in this furthest energy lies the divine moment, it may be, for him. This is the nectar moment of the poet, the artist. It acknowledges no bounds, knows no directions, is capable of no identity; it is lost, merged in the whole, escaped, for the time being, from all prison doors, all bodily detentions. And the less the artist, the greater the degree of temptation, for the greater the need of counterfeit or of substitute for the power of great inspiration.

Happily for the world, often unhappily for himself, it is the writer's nature to run while others walk,—that is, to think and feel at a pace which is not the jog trot of every day. Subconsciously or consciously, the artist knows this,—knows, in short, that the very

existence of his work depends upon mental and emotional fleetness. If it happens, after all, that the artist has simply a *tendency* to run, a desire for fleetness, and that he is not fit for the race, who knows what the end of the race will be for him? Whips there are many, and opium is the nerve lash most often used. One narcotic is set to whip up another, as for example, alcohol lashes opium awake or opium puts the fire of alcohol to sleep.

Viewing his acquired helplessness, the narcotist free and fleet-of-foot, rapidly becomes asthenic, will-less, and in the ethical sense, nerveless. The asthenic range or gamut of experience we see in such literary genius as that of De Quincey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Edgar Allan Poe, Gabriel Rossetti, James Thomson, Mrs. Browning, Swinburne, and Francis Thompson, and in many lesser personalities too numerous to mention,—for example James Clarence Mangan, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson. Of the living nothing at all may be said, but well-known, and ill-known, they are to be found everywhere in the books and magazines of to-day. Poe and James Thomson died in the gutter—narcomania often leads there. One of the remaining six, taken from an ash heap and its adjacent gutter, and surrounded by the divine tenderness of an entire family, was kept in some sort of contact with decent life to the end. Two of them made ineffectual

struggles to get free. And one made no struggle at all, but quietly closed the door of his Cheyne Walk house upon the world. Of what went on behind those Cheyne Walk doors the world still knows but little. One was made well by a great love; another by a great friendship. But of De Quincey, Coleridge, Poe, Rossetti, James Thomson, Francis Thompson, physical shipwreck, mental shipwreck, is recorded of every one and all of these.

De Quincey in the *Pleasures of Opium,* taken from the *Confessions,* gives some points which he considers to be in opium's favor: "And at this point I shall say no more than that opium is the sole *catholic* anodyne which hitherto has been revealed to man; secondly, as the one sole anodyne which in a vast majority of cases is irresistible; thirdly, as by many degrees the most potent of all known counteragents to nervous irritation, and to the formidable curse of *tædium vitæ;* fourthly, as by possibility, under an argument undeniably plausible, alleged by myself, the sole known agent—not for curing *when* formed, but for interrupting whilst likely to *be* formed—the great English scourge of pulmonary consumption." De Quincey makes four points. One point only is statement of the truth. The drug *is* irresistible.

He then launches out against Coleridge. With that amiable economy of effort, characteristic of human

nature, he tries to retrieve himself in condemning Coleridge. He talks on and on with the grave discursiveness of laudanum, excusing himself and squabbling about Coleridge as with an imaginary adversary—not so imaginary, after all, but his own conscience.

But how does the elixir of pleasure turn to pain in his *Pains of Opium?* This essay has never attracted enough attention to prove corrective to the *Pleasures.* "The opium eater loses none of his moral sensibilities or aspirations; he wishes and longs as earnestly as ever to realize what he believes possible, and feels to be exacted by duty; but his intellectual apprehension of what is possible infinitely outruns his power, not of execution only, but even of power to attempt. He lies under the weight of an incubus and nightmare; he curses the spells which chain him down from motion, he would lay down his life if he might get up and walk, but he is powerless as an infant, and cannot even attempt to rise."

The dearest wish of Samuel Taylor Coleridge was to discover the "good and beautiful" in all around him. Yet he continued through life like a prisoner, who looks over into a lovely garden. "I see, not feel, how beautiful they are," is the saddest line in English poetry, and Coleridge wrote it. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan,* written in 1797, is full of unmistakable drug

mentality. Yet its date is two years earlier than the taking of the mythical "Kendal Black Drop" in 1799. The chemistry of minds is worth something. The reaction here is plain, and not to be reasoned away by any date. With an eye on drug mentality, there can be no question, I think, but that Coleridge had recourse to narcotics long before any estimated dates. *Christabel* shows drug mentality. Repetition, color, motion, sound, effects of nature, even the flexing of the line, all reveal the bodily disturbances of drug-taking. The effect structurally is unmistakable in *Christabel.* "Long before 1799 he well knew the good and evil effects of opiates," says Dykes Campbell. James Gillman wrote: "Coleridge *began* the use of opium from bodily pain (rheumatism), and for the same reason *continued* it, till he acquired a habit too difficult under his own management to control. To use his own words, his sole sensuality was '*not* to be in pain.'"

Coleridge must have discovered laudanum at some very early date. A boy in school, long before the later attacks and the supposed Kendal Black Drop, he developed rheumatism and jaundice as the result of bathing in the New River. And it is altogether probable that sometime in these very early years he became acquainted with laudanum and the grief from which he was never free again. The whole body of

his poetry is drug work, shows drug mentality, bears the stigmata of the drug imagination.

Again it is laudanum, but this time it is an American genius who takes it: Edgar Allan Poe. In one hysterical letter to "Annie," after an encounter with Mrs. Whitman, he tells dramatically how he swallowed half a bottle of laudanum and hurried to the Boston Post Office with his letter. Of course he got into trouble. Usually half a bottle of laudanum spells trouble, and, sometimes, death. There are allusions to opium in his stories. *The Fall of the House of Usher* is a good illustration. We are not a page into this story before there is reference to opium and to the "bitter lapse into everyday life," which Poe himself knew better than his heroes. Every paragraph of *The Fall of the House of Usher* writes itself down as drug work, not alone in its study of the morbid in character, but also in other ways. Take, for example, the somatic distress due to opium, the tortured sensitiveness to light, to odors and to sounds. All this preoccupation with disease is characteristic of the narcotized mind. In another story, what but a drugged imagination would have thought of "Dark-eyed violets that writhe"? Where, but in drug work, with its diseased auditory nerves could we get so many explosive maniacal screams and cries and groans? Where, but in drug work, do we get such

broken structures, such inconsistent and unlooked-for endings? Take, for example, *Eleanora.* Where such rioting phantasmagoria of colors, odors, lights, sounds and kaleidoscopic manias of one sort or another? Of madness Poe has written in *Eleanora:* "I am come of a race noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion. Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence; whether much that is glorious, whether all that is profound, does not spring from disease of thought,—from moods of mind enacted at the expense of general intellect."

Of Poe's *Raven* Dante Gabriel Rossetti said, that Poe had represented in the *Raven* the sorrow of the lover on earth, and that he himself in the *Blessed Damozel* set out to portray the sorrow of the beloved in heaven for the loved one on earth. Be that as it may, the white wing of the Blessed Damozel is as different from the raven wing of Poe's poem as day is from night. And great is the essential difference between these two poets. Gabriel Rossetti was intellectually robust and manly; Poe was mentally hysterical but personally one of the bravest and finest of natures. This is an unprofitable business,—profitable only in one respect: that the difference between two such utterly distinct personalities must in justice be sharply differentiated. The drug addicted divide

themselves naturally into the accidentals, the doubtfuls, and the inevitables. Rossetti belonged to the first class, of accidentals; Poe to the congenital inevitables, and the two men are worlds apart in the psychology of their addiction, Rossetti to chloral, Poe to opium and alcohol.

Rossetti had good cause to loathe opium, for his wife, the beautiful Eleanor Siddall, had been caught in a laudanum addiction and died from an overdose. Following the death of his wife, the poet became a victim to insomnia. When chloral, the new and reputed harmless remedy, was discovered, Rossetti welcomed it, for insomnia was changing him from a robust and social man into an invalid and recluse. There was never any concealment about his chloral addiction. For several years chloral made no apparent inroads upon him; later its effect could have been scarcely more blighting,—but chiefly upon his personal life.

Chloral may have diminished the quantity of Rossetti's work—it is not evident that it injured the quality. In taking up Rossetti from this point of view, it seemed certain that 1868, the date on which he began to take chloral, would prove a watershed date for both life and work and that from 1868 on the descent unto death would be physically and mentally swift and terrible. Work on the *House of Life Son-*

nets, written before 1868 and those written afterwards, substantiates no such conclusion. And I have found no thought illuminating on this point except that the fiber of Rossetti's mental stuff was too closely woven, too strongly knit, to be easily destroyed, and that the deterioration of mind and body did not, in this case, keep an equal pace up to the hour of his early death. Chloral seems to have made Rossetti in his personal relationships a victim of morbid and causeless suspicion of his friends,—those who were closest to him. Unquestionably his addiction made him an object of pity to those who loved him, the dragging gait, the altered appearance, the growing dependence upon others, the heavily-hung, musty rooms of the house on Cheyne Walk, where, except for the studio, the blessed daylight was shut out and candles and gloom reigned: the contradictory and painfully personal speech about friends, the loquacity, the foolish boastfulness about the enormously large quantities of chloral which he took, his imaginary literary and personal enemies, his increasing and distressful irresolution, his occasional and bitter violences of temper, were all gifts from the great and only enemy of Rossetti's life,—death-dealing chloral. Hall Caine, who lived with him during the last year, saw him in all the sad intimacy of his infirmities. He, Watts, Shields, Christina Rossetti and Mrs. Rossetti

were with him on that Easter Day—day of lilies he so loved—when Rossetti paid in full, at the early working age of fifty-three, the death penalty which narcotism, irrespective of person and of genius, exacts from all who become its slaves.

James Thomson, whose *City of Dreadful Night* made his name famous, was a periodic drinker,—and during these attacks, which increased in frequency as Thomson decreased in strength, he was, to use the words of a little child who saw him so affected, "Mr. Thomson's wicked brother." Yet that little child could not have understood, or the word "wicked" would never have been used. He was assuredly only Mr. Thomson's "unfortunate" brother. Of innate cowardice, of dissipation, of vice, there can be in James Thomson's case no accusation, for he was the gentlest, noblest, most lovable and most gifted among men, never failing in constancy to himself when he was himself. There can be no doubt but that James Thomson was a dipsomaniac, and that his periodic addictions were due to mania. He was by nature temperate in food, temperate in drink, temperate in speech. This was periodic madness, always preceded by several days of deepening melancholy and despair. When self-poisoning from accumulated toxins had passed the point of toleration, then came the neural explosion with automatic reversion to alcohol; after

that a period of complete delirium from which Thomson brought back no recollections whatsoever to his normal and sane life. Following each attack would be months of hard work, temperate, even ascetic living, of desperate struggle, of pitiful and devoted consideration of his friends, and then the whirling thoughts and the abyss once more, for "Mr. Thomson's wicked brother" had come for him again. What curse—what unnecessary curse—of self-loathing and vice his poems reveal in tragic measure! Poor James Thomson, no more to be censured than the child born lame!

The mental stigmata of the narcotism of alcohol do not stand out so conspicuously as other narcotisms. The pictures drawn by the alcoholic are sharp and distinct. Take the sharpness of the pictures in the *City of Dreadful Night.* Dürer's Melancholia itself is not more distinct. Compare the dark solemnity and weight of the *City of Dreadful Night,* with its pictures bitten in as if by acid on metal, with the strange gayety and luminous phantasmagoria of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan.* To use a good old-fashioned word, the very "heft" of the two poems will tell quickly which is alcohol and which is opium. If it may be expressed so: the structure of alcohol in writing always weighs heavier than opium. The purple patches of alcohol are unmistakable. But even more unmistakable are

the opium stigmata, as, for example, in *Kubla Khan,* the alternate shiftings and drag of attack, of plan, of purpose, of setting, of character, the syncopation, the phantasmagoria and hallucinations.

Bertram Dobell, who died Christmas, 1914, the faithful friend and generous protector of James Thomson, as well as the editor of the poems, has written wise and sympathetic words on genius and intemperance, which conclude with the statement that with James Thomson it was misfortune and not fault. The end came in the gutter. And the end typifies our senseless waste of genius. Perhaps when society is sufficiently civilized and sufficiently intelligent there may be laws that will protect those who can no longer protect themselves. Until that day the gutter will take its toll of the last moments of men of genius. For some time Thomson himself had seen how in ever-narrowing circles, vulturelike, the end was swooping towards him. Desperate and homeless, without even shoes to cover his feet, with brick walls and mud of the street for his couch at night, he lived the last two months of his life.

The differences between the various narcotisms are usually without distinction as far as disaster is concerned. The psychology of their expression or manifestation is of endless variety—a morbid study, but of much value nowadays. Decadence is forever popular

with, or essential to, some mentalities, to the sensation hunters and the dissatisfied and the exhausted. With such, as a rule, only acute or sub-acute inflammations can produce those grotesqueries of thought mistakenly called originality and as mistakenly published as such in certain types of bibelots and magazines. Sometimes—not always—alcohol, excessive nicotine, organic disease, the use of habit-forming drugs are causes of these mental perversions.

The record of opium havoc is to be read by every one who wishes, in the writing of to-day. But this, unfortunately, only the alienist sees, and sees clearly where the average reader finds something he feels is different, and calls it charming or "thrilling." The average reader is not aware of the fractured thought. But the literary alienist knows just what lies behind the cracks in a particular story. The narcotic mentality writes itself down as alcohol or opium. There is no mistaking it. How much whisky went to the birth of certain stories by a well-known fiction writer, recently dead, is on record in a certain sanitarium. How much opium lies behind the phantasmagoria which plays over the work of one of our foremost and greatest writers of to-day is evident to the mind trained in this detective work and can be followed up by all who care to lay hands on a certain drug story published in 1911 in a well-known American magazine.

Modern business methods have undertaken to chaperon imagination which is now fast becoming respectable through salesmanship! But what is imagination? A free combining of that which comes to us through experience or memory. Or, to quote William James, "When the mental pictures are of data freely combined and reproducing no past combination exactly, we have acts of imagination, properly so-called." What, then, we re-combine will depend upon our experience. If senses of touch, hearing, sight, smell, are diseased, imagination or the free combination of the material of experience will be diseased. A human body stigmatized rightly or wrongly by the kick of locomotor ataxia is no riddle to us. But an imagination stigmatized by the drug-drag is not even recognized. Sometimes, the drug-drag shows itself in hiatus, as, for example, the sonorous emptiness of Poe's *Raven*. Sometimes it shows itself in the twist of thought or a crack in the structure or the perversion of an emotion or the repeated choice of certain types of words or a certain type of syncopation. But declare itself it inevitably will.

It is difficult to confine criticism to that which is called "esthetic." What, after all, is meant by the word "art"? What by the words "criticism of an art"? Criticism, like everything else, is a human affair or it is nothing. There is no separation, ex-

cept the symbolic, between art and life and there can be no arbitrary distinction made between form and content or a poet and his work. It was James Thomson who said that all of us have "the opportunity of mastering the common facts of nature and human life." Yet these are all too often the facts which are least known. . . . Somewhere in a letter Tennyson has written that the nature of a rake frequently comes straighter than that of a prig, for it has behind it more passion and vitality. It is the privilege of these studies to refrain from praise of mean and petty virtues and to study the sanative "faults of the great-hearted."

II

POETRY OF THE OUTCAST

II

POETRY OF THE OUTCAST

They peered with old and evil eyes,
  They pointed fingers crooked to grab,
They leered, and nudged, and satyr-wise
  They termed her like a naked drab;
Till beauty sickened in her place
With stricken eyes, and ashen face.

ISOBEL HUME.

I

A LIFE and death struggle with poverty, engaged in for over two generations in any family, is almost certain to produce results in physical disease and mental disaster. In cold figures and warm prophecies any economist and sociologist could predict more or less what would happen—and did happen!—in the Poe family. . . . Why defend Poe! Why all this clamor about his vices? His vices were those common to his period and not special to himself. No doubt Goethe did evil more frequently than Poe. No one thinks of throwing stones at Goethe! It is not done simply because Goethe had the greater animal and mental vitality which made it possible for him to surmount experience and go on. In that en-

ergy which acts as a converter of experience both Poe and James Thomson were lacking. They went down,—not on!

Poe's grandfather, General David Poe, the friend of Lafayette, was a strong and decisive man who knew what he wanted to do and did it. There was never a time when Edgar Poe did not know what he wanted to do. The last tragic journey he took was in behalf of the *Stylus,*—the magazine it was the dream of his life to found. Poe's mother was a good woman, leaving no ill rumor behind her, and a good actress. After the tragic, sordid death of the young father and mother, both of tuberculosis and within three days of each other, the Poe children were found half-starved, half-clothed, and half-stupefied with bread soaked in gin by the old Welsh woman who was their nurse and who, poor over-burdened ignorant soul, was trying in this way "to keep them quiet and make them strong." The toxins of tuberculosis, the poisons of gin, were two of the first cradle gifts made to the little Edgar Poe!

The children were adopted by some kind-hearted people, Edgar by the Allans mythically reputed "rich." In 1811 when John Allan of Richmond, Virginia, adopted Poe he was a poor man, living upstairs over his shop. He was never a wealthy man until just before Poe entered the University of Virginia. As a

boy and lad Poe seems to have been physically fit, good at leaping and jumping and with extraordinary records as a fencer and swimmer. In his school work he was brilliant and masterful and with but one student ahead of him. He was not, however, very amiable and he was willful. And he seems neither in school nor throughout the rest of his life to have had any power for making intimate friends. Edgar Poe was beautiful in appearance, with large dark melancholy eyes, a fine brow, well-cut sensitive nose, somewhat cynical lips, structurally a delicate but not a weak jaw bone and with a figure upright, athletic, well-groomed, on legs sturdy and a bit bowed.

The dearest wish of every child is to have what other children have,—neither more nor less. The years covered by his school life in England, where the Allans entered him at Stoke-Newington, are the years most sensitive to influence in any boy. He visited the Allans in London yet he was isolated from anything which might be called "home-ties" during these five or six years. Then probably began that isolation which surrounded him for all the rest of his life and which meant that only two human beings came to know him well or came very close to him: his child-wife and his mother-in-law. At the University of Virginia there is the same record with regard to his personal relationships as that at Stoke-Newington; he

was cut off from others, surrounded by something in his own personality and nobody knew him. A sense of separation from others had been bred in him through knowledge of the tragic history of his family. Under certain conditions his word was not to be trusted, and there can be no question but that Poe in some ways and at times was untruthful.

It is possible to make quite a pretty story—as if they were exceptional!—out of Poe's wild ways at the University of Virginia. But they were the ways then of his age and of his kind. He drank and gambled; he was wild-spirited; he broke rules and ran up debts. The thing that was exceptional about Poe was his brilliant record as a student. Intellectually he had a record of honors. Ransome says Poe was ill-educated. On the contrary, he was well educated. The University of Virginia gave an education not to be despised by any one except an Englishman and then only by that Englishman who failed to know that the University's tutors were largely imported from England and Europe. Granted he made mistakes, the capacity for making them shows a certain pliantness of nature not found in the rigidities of the perfect man or woman. Poe was "wild" but he was not a rake.

Poe was proud; he was dreamy. Looking into the traits of his nature, it is seen that much ground was

prepared for the poet in the isolation with which he was always surrounded; in his tendency to dream and in his intellectual power; and, a thing probably seldom left out of the composition of a poet, splendid physical vitality soon run through with in the case of most poets and in the case of Poe.

After his University days others who knew him wrote or spoke of his voice as low, his speech cool and decisive, his manner enthusiastic and unconventional. Bishop Fitzgerald described the "strangely magnetic" eyes, the distingué appearance which was that of a "man bearing the stamp of genius and the charm of a melancholy that drew one towards him with a strange sympathy." His English editor, Hannay, writes of the face as having "lineaments of delicacy, such as belong only to genius or high blood,—the forehead grand and pale; the eyes dark, and gleaming with sensibility and soul; a face to inspire one with interest and curiosity." Sarah Helen Whitman wrote of "the unmatched glory of his face." There is an autobiographical portrait of him in *The Fall of the House of Usher.* But those who knew him best—and that was certainly not Poe himself—are those who have given us the imperishable portraits of what he was. None is better than come from the considered and yet passionate appreciation of Mrs. Whitman for this man whom she loved.

A comparison of Edgar Allan Poe's and James Thomson's attitude toward women makes an interesting distinction between the two men. It is possible to know somewhat of a man socially as well as morally by what he thinks of women. James Thomson, gentle and generous and dignified though he was, was characteristically complacent as a male in limiting sympathy with women only to what they have experienced. According to Thomson men have sympathy not alone on the basis of what they have experienced but also on the basis of what they can understand. In other words, men have collective comprehension of the sufferings and troubles of mankind from which women are debarred. The inference is plain: they are adorable creatures but (or because?) they have no understanding! This is a typical middle class conception of women which dates back a little way to a middle class couple in a middle class garden called Eden. Poe was accustomed to a more privileged class of women than those Eden creatures of an Old Dispensation,—a privileged class of whom in Old Virginia there are many records, women whose attested attributes of gentleness and courage and understanding and service have been not only an honor to Virginia but the pride of its men. It is true that Poe did live many "harmless little German poems" with other women,—chiefly with poetesses of the second order.

And what could be more harmless than these Platonic effusions of words,—this cambric tea of the emotions! Apparently his was a nature to be controlled by love only and that of a woman chiefly. He was morbid, but he was not sensual. Again and again he idealizes the figure of a woman and in a way that is the strongest possible proof of the essential innocence of his nature. Yet he seems never to have had a sense of close obligation to any one except to Virginia and Mrs. Clemm. One biographer of Poe says that "women are the most eager and impassioned defenders of his bedraggled memory." Possibly! Women are rather in the habit of devoting themselves to lost causes, including all too often the man they love! It must and always will take a woman rather than a man to appreciate certain qualities in Poe. None but a woman can ever know what it is to love the child in a man and that sometimes a lost child.

Certainly Poe drank. But then most of the gentlemen of his day did. The discovery is not profound to any one who has possessed Southern grandfathers! At West Point he had already acquired the habit of drinking. Later, in a letter, his cousin William Poe warned him: "There is one thing I am anxious to caution you against, and which has been a great enemy to our family. I hope, however, in your case, it may prove unnecessary—'a too free use of the bottle.'"

White, one of his editors-in-chief, wrote him: "No man is safe that drinks before breakfast." It would be possible to pile up this sort of evidence. On the other hand as many testimonies to Poe's sobriety as to his inebriety are available. And there is a further development in such a study as that of Appleton Morgan when admitting the contradictory evidence of those who did and those who didn't know him at Fordham, he says that those who did know him said he did not drink and those who didn't know him told scandalous tales about him. Certainly Poe drank, but what was peculiar about Poe's drinking was that he drank so little.

The question arises immediately: how could such a small amount of liquor have such a large effect upon him? There seems to be no reason for disagreeing with Dr. Mott's and Mrs. Shew's contemporary diagnosis, that Poe was suffering from lesion of one side of the brain. This meant that the use of stimulants or tonics would produce insanity,—and in Poe's case did produce temporary attacks. *Per saltum* the conclusion is reached that Poe was insane. Except as a lawyer's or legal term there are no such misleading or exclusive terms as sanity or insanity. There is no absolute boundary line. At certain points, for all except the bigoted moralist, life itself becomes a sort of madness, to and fro over whose borderland between

sanity and insanity we weave in the come and go of living: its sudden blows, its brutal angers, its crippling sorrows, its delirious joys, its obsessions whether of love or religion, its overwork.

There were enough elements of good fortune and opportunity in Poe's life to have assured success of many sorts to another man differently constituted. The fundamental question with Poe is rather that of his nervous stability than of underlying events. While perhaps not actively tuberculous himself, Poe was of known tuberculous stock, a fact looming up formidably in neurotic significance. It has been said that some time between the repudiation of Poe by the Allans and his literary adoption by Kennedy, the weak spot in Poe had been found and that he emerged from his obscurity with his "habits of indulgence" fixed upon him: drugs and drink. And one finds subtle implications in various biographies that there were "poems" not so harmless as the German lyric variety. Possibly. One cannot survey the abandoned, lonely crushed life of a Francis Thompson and his "street girl," even with its recovered holiness in the hearts of the Meynells, without realizing that such "poems" of many varieties are not uncommon in the lives of men. However that may be, Poe's was never a sensual nature. The weak spot in Poe was his inherited nervous constitution which remained uncorrected by

his upbringing. And the story of what a splint of firm steady training during his boyhood might have done for those subnormal nerves will never be told.

II

The Raven was first published in the *Evening Mirror,* January 29, 1845, from advanced sheets of the *American Whig Review.* Poe was then thirty-four and his habits were fixed upon him. When Poe offered this poem to Graham he said his wife and Mrs. Clemm were starving. The poem was condemned, but several men who were in the office at that time took up a contribution of $15 to be given Poe as charity. The music of *The Raven* is never exhausted,—a sort of clear-chiming of rime which makes its marvel. Perhaps as far as the "bird" itself is concerned, the purple curtains and velvet seats and perfume and violet linings and censers and shrieks are something more than unbiological. And the recurrent theme of the death of a beautiful woman found in so many of Poe's poems—among them besides *The Raven, Annabel Lee, Lenore, The Sleeper, Ulalume, To One in Paradise*—but adds conviction that here is the thing which is abnormal at work. The mournful recurrence of those words "no more" or their equivalent "nevermore" deepens the conclusion. In the third stanza of

To One in Paradise "no more" is repeated three times. In the short poem *To Zante* "no more" is repeated five times. In that wonder of the swinging of full-toned words *The Haunted Palace* with its magical lines

> Banners—yellow, glorious, golden—
> On its roof did float and flow
> (This, all this, was in the olden
> Time, long ago),

the concluding two words to the whole poem are "no more." In *Silence* we have these words used as key words to the meaning. In *The Sleeper* "n'er . . . more"; in *Eulalie* "never again," and in other poems other equivalents are used for this characteristically hopeless negative.

As sound these words have a very distinct suggestion,—some circling of the narcotized auditory nerve it may be—a strange obsessive repetition to be found in De Quincey, Coleridge, James Thomson and Francis Thompson. Part of this effect of "circling" in Poe is created by the overlapping of words, phrases, and lines which give a curious effect of flow in motion,—often a whirling current and of its circling return which is the equivalent of echo in sound. A few illustrations will be sufficient.

> This, all this, was in the olden
> Time, long ago.

Here it is the overlapping of the phrase "olden time long ago." *The Bells* as a whole is a famous example. Or take the last two lines before the refrain line of each stanza of *The Raven*. And Poe's use of the sea and sea-sounding words deepens the effect of flow and recurrence in motion. Examples might be multiplied indefinitely. There is a touch of delirium about this effect in Poe's work.

This is something more than what Ransome calls the "whispering-gallery quality" of Poe's work. Behind that echoing sibilance is some numbed vacancy of meaning. Not much is really said in such a pathological type of eloquence. This tendency to mouth sound also belongs to Poe's obsession for high-sounding names. Not only his tales but also his poems would be a negro treasure house for baptismal suggestion. No transplanted uneducated native of Africa ever cared more for such sprinkled nomenclature. Here are a few illustrations: De Vere, Annabel, Roderick, Madeline, Victorine, Fortunato, Berenice, Eleonora, Morella, Ligeia, etc. But even in this trifling illustration there is a certain eloquence which does nothing more than rebound from the side-walls of emptiness. Tennyson, too, suffered from an affliction of inexpensive and gilt and tinsel names—the meretricious cheapness of mere prettiness.

A sense of humor—not history—makes such a col-

lection of names and phrases to be found in Poe's *Lenore* amusing; Stygian rivers, saintly souls, Guy de Veres, rigid biers, golden throne and heaven and such expressions as one finds in *To My Mother* of affinities, in *The Bells* about turtledoves, in *Annabel Lee* of winged seraphs, and in *The City by the Sea* of kingly halls. These recorded phrases and a host of others unrecorded can but prove that after all not only the accent of every day speech but also its words are best and are sufficient for great poetry. Even such splendid lines from Poe's *City by the Sea* as

> While from a proud tower in the town
> Death looks gigantically down

cannot make us forgive or forget the wear and tear of piled-up eloquent but outworn phrases. Nor can the marvel of riming in *Ulalume* make us unconscious of the Guy de Veres that rime elsewhere with biers. Nor does the way Poe swings into a full-toned word like "Porphyrogene" in *The Haunted Palace* anesthetize us to the emptiness of other words. Yet in his critical work it was Poe who emphasized the fact that in enforcing the truth "simple, precise, terse" words should be used. It is perhaps never safe to assume that a poem is not "enforcing the truth" even if it happen to be a truth remote from the one the poet had in mind! William Blake, too, loved strange

names,—as for example in the *Prophetic Books* and even in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. But for Blake these names had significance and, being pseudo-biblical, they were religious in intention. With Poe they are decorative and without underlying meaning. And we shall look in vain in Poe for the precise and reassuring commonplaces of Old John, Tom Dacre, Dick, Joe, Ned, Jack, the Parson, Dame Lurch (we suspect her of having been put in to rime with birch), Mary, Susan and Emily, to be found in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Delights there are in Poe's verse not to be matched for sheer magic anywhere in poetry unless it be in Coleridge's poems, nevertheless,—or therefore?—refracting their beauty from some angle of the abnormal rather than the normal. There are vowels and rimes so toned in Poe's poems that they reach one with something of the same overwhelming mystery and delirium of sound recorded in the consciousness only in profound illness.

Despite all his abnormalities—his decadent search for strange words and abnormal states of mind—there is something essentially right and human about Poe's themes: love, sin, sorrow, the occult, the death of a beautiful woman, fate. Obsessive, yes, with the quality of *idée fixe* due to some injury or truncating of part of experience. Yet they have their use, for

in many cases these "injuries" have been shaped into beauty of form. Nature is the greatest of all economists. Her energy injured or defeated in one direction she throws it into another and so in some sort overtakes her first intention and recovers it in expressions of power or beauty. In the history of the injuries resulting from civilization this provides a curious and illuminating study. In the work of artists in whom degeneration or disease processes are going forward, it is the thought content rather than the form or shape of poems that is injured. Indeed even while the thought dies, the form,—the poem's shape of beauty—seems to gain some illumination, some ghostly aura from quick-burning nerves. These themes, sorrow, the death of a beautiful woman, fate—to take three of them—have been better developed as themes by other poets but in no hands shaped to more perfect forms of beauty than in *The Raven, Ulalume, The Haunted Palace,* and *Annabel Lee.*

The only reason often for the peculiar type of metaphysical and scientific jargon Poe used was ignorance. As Poe revealed later to Ingram, he really did think that he was to revolutionize the world of physical and metaphysical science. Maybe the "wonderful" is unfulfilled understanding, but whatever it is it is not ignorance. At the best Poe deals with the terms of an outworn science. And he made the mistake in at-

tempting to explain facts on a scientific basis which writers make who are untrained along the lines of scientific research or who are only superficially self-trained by means of undirected reading. When is Poe true to natural fact? When does he see things in nature as they are? It is the business of the scientist to see things as they are; of the artist to see them as they are but redacted by the soul. And in a sense it is required of the poet that he be both scientist and artist. The man well trained along scientific lines is likely to bring more understanding to the appreciation of an art than one who has not been. The artist who is unequipped to face hard natural fact sentimentalizes his energy. For example, Poe's poetry has a touch of that delicious soup plate of cream of morals with its crisp floating croutons of platitude,—a very satisfactory dish to the Victorian. Poe's scientific jargon is one expression of his liking for making a show of learning,—an impulse due no doubt to an unsatisfied or defeated intellectual hunger.

Oil might be thrown upon the troubled seas of many morbid imaginings of Poe's by the clear cool facts of nature. As humanity has drawn nearer in scientific knowledge to nature it has drawn further away from the sick domination of such *morbidezza*. It was James Thomson who said that all of us have "the opportunity of mastering the common facts of nature and

human life." Yet these are the very facts which Poe evaded and which all too often he never even saw. The truth of science and that truth which is due to intuition, are two different types of truth. For the first Poe was not trained. For the second he was partially warped. Poe often rushed in where well-trained scientists would have feared to tread. His scholarship was never well-grounded scientifically. He erected huge strange structures of conclusions on insecure foundations of fact. Poe's work deals convincingly with the infernal which would be satisfactory if there were any inferno except substantial substitutes for hell upon this earth. And one of Poe's critics grows excited because Poe affirms that he is God. That certainly was more reassuring than having him affirm that he was something else! Poe, during his lifetime, may have become abnormally sensitive to the fact that popular opinion was busy with its well-worn jest of affixing horns and felt that some counter-affirmation was necessary. It is a simple human truth that those who have so often been crushed by a cruel social mechanism are more God than realized. Calvary has many hills in many lands.

The greatest in modern poetry, for example Wordsworth, Browning, Meredith, have kept not only more or less close to the utterance of every day speech but also close to the facts of nature. In Wordsworth

what is most beautiful is most natural. In Poe never! For there what is most beautiful is most unnatural. Effort to reach what Poe would call "the beauty above" cannot be made to account for this. "Eternity" is not necessarily "night's Plutonian shore" or the "ghoul haunted woodland of Weir," although one might wish it to be for the sake of some people who profitably could be sent there. Benedetto Croce has said: "But since . . . knowledge has descended to earth, and is no longer conceived as a more or less pallid copy of an immobile reality, but remains always human, and produces, not abstract ideas, but concrete concepts which are syllogisms and historical judgments, perceptions of the real, the practical is no longer something which represents a degeneration of knowledge, a second fall from heaven to earth, or from paradise to hell, nor something that can be resolved upon or abstained from, but is implied in theory itself, as a demand of theory; and as the theory, so the practice." The unnaturalness of Poe's poetry is not supernaturalness. They are two different qualities. Reason is one thing and poetry is sometimes another. But the truth of poetry, although it may not be that of reason, is not necessarily abnormal any more than it is abnormal to long for beauty or truth beyond that which we actually know. Fortunately in the arts we are somewhat recovering from the influence of a Puritanical society

which looked upon the worship of beauty as sinful. The quality of the unnatural beauty in Poe's poetry springs from Poe's self. It is the secret of his own soul, the color of his own spirit. It is the projection of his own experience, and Poe had great power in projecting experience beyond the actual. But so, too, had William Blake! One has only to imagine Poe settling down to composing a book of poems called *Songs of Innocence* to become ludicrously aware of the difference in quality. How the *Raven* would crowd the margins and emotions of the *Songs of Innocence,*—and even *Experience!* Imagine *The Lamb* led out by Poe! It will not do. In a sense the poem *is* the poet and in Poe there is no shepherd, no lamb anywhere, no echoing green on which children dance, no little black boy who could possibly love an English child, white or otherwise, and no God the Father dear. Certain qualities of tenderness were altogether lacking in Poe.

There is a type of intellectual power in Poe's poetry which, it seems to me, is the easiest to misunderstand and the hardest to comprehend of intellectual power to be found in any poet. It is so unhuman. This intellectuality is of the very essence of him. Out of his reasoning power he gets somewhat the same sort of excitement that another man would get out of love or out of fear. Often there is juggling and jingling of

words, phrases, and rimes which convince the ear but there is not much fundamental emotion behind them. James Thomson had personal sympathy for individual human suffering wherever he found it. But for Poe it would have been impossible to have written or even thought of those lines from Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night:*

> "Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
> In that same city of tremendous night,
> Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
> Of fellowship in all disastrous fight,
> I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
> Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
> Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

Poe felt that he was alone; he had no sense of fellowship that could be called either mental or emotional. And, I think, he wanted none. Where he analyzes suffering, the interest is intellectual. Where he describes love the experience described is abnormal for two reasons: because it is outside the usual and the interest is analytical or intellectual rather than sympathetic. But to say that Poe did not understand human love is to forget the greatest experience in his life: his passionate adoration for Virginia and Mrs. Clemm.

Something a little dry—like light—there was always

in Poe's genius. Out of the "four elements" which compose this earth with which we revolve, it could have been said of Shelley's genius that fire, air and water were most symbolic. Of Poe never! Of Shakespeare the cosmos of all four; of Blake fire and air and water but not earth; of Wordsworth air and earth and water but not fire; of Tennyson such elements as would behave themselves in a well-ordered English household. Poe smiled infrequently and he never laughed. His was a nature chill and dry in places, white hot in others. Of him, Lowell wrote, "But the heart somehow seems all squeezed out by the mind." I do not think that was true,—though tears and laughter are equally close to the heart. Something deformed, shrill, over-intellectual, thin, there was about Poe's sense of humor. He has written "stuff"—supposedly funny—as for example in *King Pest,* for which even a school boy should not be forgiven. Poe had no sense of humor, but he loved a hoax. For him the hoax must have had two attractions; the intellectual agility it required and the element of mystery in it. James Thomson had a sense of humor which kept a certain fine balance in him to the end. Poe had none or he could never have written this line from *The Raven:*

"Perched, and sat, and nothing more."

Poe was like Shelley in having no sense of humor and unlike Shelley who wanted to do—and did!—long monotonous poems all awash with figures and color and ideas. Where Shelley covered immense canvasses which would have perished but for the supporting power of better work, Poe whittled away at perfecting a poem no bigger than a cherry stone. Loose distensions of the material of poetry and prose have always been characteristic of the English. Of the French, never. And Poe was more French than English in all his artistic adherences. Yet many of Poe's "noble passages" are rhetorical. Victorian he was perhaps in this rather than Georgian. It would be interesting to make a study of Poe's intellectual sub-soil if it might thereby be discovered from what he derived so much that was both meretricious and romantic. Was occultism the influence of Germany or something constitutional due to his neurotic and tubercular inheritance? Are the ghosts, worms, beautiful ladies German romantic influence? And the sense of horror due to the German ballad? And there is a sentimental type of poem Poe liked to do which is both astonishingly German and altogether inferior! In some of his prose work, there is the wonderful rhythm of the Bible, as for example, *Silence,—a Fable,* but no msssage, no thought, only sublimated Gothic romance-stuff.

Poe would crown even beauty without passion,—an

impossibility since beauty is ecstasy of a sort, sustained, broken or recollected. Except in his poetry, can it be said that he ever works as the great creative artist? Intellectual analysis, *per se,* is not creative work. The answer to questions of this sort must depend upon whether one considers Poe's temperament or his power of thought more important. There is a sort of keenness about Poe's watchfulness in the creation of a poem or a story which is purely intellectual. Over the minutiæ of detail he never trips. Nor was any length of time too great for the elaboration or revision of a poem. He began *To Helen* when he was fourteen years old; he was still revising it when he was thirty. One finds oneself often wondering whether there was not some sort of a marked separation between Poe's personal and intellectual life. If in his personal life he could not be depended on to tell the truth, in his intellectual life he knew and practiced justice. As a critic he was both fearless and courteous.

Poe was never a danger to humanity in that he would not think. If, as Blake said they were, the sins of the mind are the greatest, then it is possible that the "virtuous" narrow-minded blocking human progress are greater sinners than a stumbling James Thomson or Edgar Allan Poe. Lowell wrote of Poe that he was "a man who thinks for himself, and says what he

thinks, and knows well what he is talking about." But this was written before Poe began to say what he thought about Lowell! Except as a family possession, no Lowell likes independence! Poe took criticism out of the gilded office of advertising and the drawing room atmosphere of "puffing." It is difficult, as I said, to confine criticism to that which we call esthetic. Yet that is what Poe attempted. It is possible to say that style in writing is a convention but even so, too, is the shape of a tree convention. Style in a poem is organic, —nature at work as ardently looking for a shell for thought as she is eager to house the caddis worm. It must be admitted, however, that in some of the criticism Poe has given is felt the mechanician as well as the technician.

The probability is that if Poe's circumstances had been kinder and his education more complete, he would have been one of the greatest of critics. Even handicapped, he was, as has been said, "the literary conscience of his time." Poe's America more assiduously valet-ed and maid-ed—if that were possible!—the arts of England and Europe than does the American intellectual flunkeydom of to-day. Poe found himself in a "literary" atmosphere of foolish flattery and sentimental praise. Except for his tendency to overpraise second and third rate poetesses he bent no knee at any altar. Indeed the famous Longfellow war showed him

capable of folly of another extreme. The mediocrity of the Longfellow type of literature would have been sufficient to make Poe misunderstood. Poe challenged that mediocrity,—rudely and ungenerously. Longfellow's attitude towards Poe's attack proves him to have been what he was; a generous and kindly gentleman, but it does not prove him to have been a major poet,—a slight confusion of issues between pedigree and poem in which New England has been involved more than once! Poe, in his critical work, was always pitted against the typical American moral attitude with regard to art. He did not believe that a poem should necessarily include a moral. His esthetic principles and insight were too great for any such assumption. He thought that poetry had nothing to do with the sort of truth the teacher is supposed to teach. Poe never could have said what Wordsworth did: "I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing,"—partly because the word teacher meant one thing to Poe and something higher to Wordsworth. Poe's emphasis was entirely on "beauty." He confused "truth" and "beauty," failing to realize that theirs is an identity in any great poem.

Poe worked hard at writing. He was not only a genius but, as is not always true of geniuses, he was industrious, his work was good and there was plenty of it. One of his critics speaks of him as "Pegasus in

harness," and that is exactly what he was, doing now "job work" on a small book, then devoting his energies to his tales. He had achieved all the "Poe" types of stories before he was thirty years old.

III

In Mr. Woodberry's masterly biography of Poe, from some of whose unsympathetic views of Poe one must dissent, is written, "In the first lines of the literary history of a young nation, the truth is better than a lie, however gilded, and in the case of genius, that so easily gathers romantic power over the heart and wins its devotion, candor is a social virtue." But candor is an exceedingly difficult virtue. To say that Poe drank, and, later, took opium in its tincture as laudanum, is to state facts. But these facts so stated make limited truth, for in the mere statement it is not learned *why* he drank and took opium nor yet the relation of these habits to the details of his life and his work. And as soon as analysis is attempted "candor" becomes difficult. Biographic work, well done, can be —should be—as free from moralizing and ethical strictures as a great poem. For the intelligent it carries its own message without any necessity for moral emphasis. To watch that superbly endowed self-consciousness of Poe's do battle with the fate and obstacle which

lie in all matter, to see the gradual engulfment in his fate, to be there at the end with him, is to watch one of the greatest human dramas ever enacted. No doubt but that candor is a "social virtue." But frankness about what, the facts of Poe's life?

Candor is a social virtue but understanding is a greater virtue. To Fate itself may be left all the Katharsis that ever was or ever will be. But upon understanding must depend the building of stronger lives and more impregnable social conditions. The *hic jacet* methods of many of Poe's biographers are the methods which dead men have given them. Maybe they feel comfortable in their working out of Poe's traits. But it is quite impossible to put the young Poe and the older Poe side by side and not realize that these biographers have created two utterly different human beings—a human being with, so to speak, a break in the middle!

In the new criticism, as certain to come in the explanation of mental processes as new developments in aërial navigation, many facts now pushed to one side or falsely examined on so-called "ethical" grounds will be accounted for on physical grounds. In the new criticism it will become necessary to explain on a basis quite removed from sermons on dissipation such a letter as this from Dostoevsky, written from the Fortress, August 27, 1849, to his brother Michael:

"Whenever formerly I had such nervous disturbances, I made use of them for writing; in such a state I could write much more and much better than usual; but now I refrain from work that I may not utterly destroy myself." The new criticism will have powers for testing values unknown to the present,—powers based on a developed psychology and sociology.

When we have the results of the mingled use of opium and alcohol in the poet's work, as in Poe, and to a slighter extent in James Thomson, there arise obscure problems not to be understood. More than half a century ago Helen Whitman in her defence of Poe repeated George Gilfillan's words that there should be "new and more searching methods of critical as well as moral analysis." With regard to the effects upon the auditory nerves I think the results of opium are pronounced. This can be best studied in Francis Thompson and Poe,—although the case in Poe is not wholly a clear one. Perhaps the sense of echo, of reverberation, in Poe's work can be accounted for on pathological grounds. Assuredly Poe's sense of the endless drag of time must be explained on the grounds of disease due to opium. In connection with the effect of opium or alcohol on the auditory nerves it would be natural to think of Coleridge. And it is he who first comes to my mind, but I suspect that Coleridge was endowed at birth, as was Keats, with phenomenal deli-

cacy of hearing. Vision, under the influence of either alcohol or opium or both, is more deranged with Poe, Coleridge and even Francis Thompson than it is with James Thomson,—a detail in part due no doubt to idiosyncrasies of the imagination. Peculiar secretiveness, that legendary sign of opium addiction, Poe had. But there was not a trace of it in De Quincey, Coleridge, Thomson, Mrs. Browning or Francis Thompson.

What Poe did in three decades despite poverty, bad habits and illness was no doubt more than all of his critics rolled together could have achieved. The relation of Poe's work to his abnormal habits is not clear. I am not inclined to think that his abnormal habits contributed to his work. He wrote a few poems which will live as long as the English language does; and tales unlike anything we had known before. As an artist Poe is entitled to high regard, short only of the highest. Why should one refuse him regard any less high as a man? Indeed witnessing the struggle he made against the monstrous odds of poverty, illness, bad luck and irreplaceable loss, it is possible to say that he deserved even greater regard as a man than as an artist. Among the narcotized writers Poe and James Thomson were the bravest in the opposition which they put up to fate. But it is a curious fact that once a man is landed in the gutter he is not to be got out,—that is, only by the Salvation Army! And after that wher-

ever he goes his redeemed reputation must beat a drum. Nevertheless, the time has passed for blame of Poe the man. The kind of appraisal which has been meted out to him belongs to the extinct-Dodo-morals variety. It is the sort of thing which in the ardor of his defense leads even so distinguished and humane a biographer as Professor Harrison to write: "No opium sot, no habitual victim of spirituous liquors, could have written this firm, clear, steady, delightfully legible feminine handwriting." But for me such "defense" has no values. In the first place Poe does not need defenders, he needs those who understand him. The use of such words as "opium sot" is a bit out of date and is as startling to any one intelligent about the neuroses of opium addiction as "tuberculosis soak" would be to the student of the tubercle bacillus. One cocks a mirthful eye at the parallel phrase which does duty for "drunk;" "habitual victim of spirituous liquors." Why, if not a social concession, that wordy respectful genuflection to tipplers? And finally this dictum is not true: some of the firmest and clearest handwritings ever known are those of drug addicts and alcoholics. Why write of opium sots any more than of tuberculosis soaks? All judgment of a man's work is confused with suggested moral issues. What angered the public was that there was so much about Poe it could not understand. This always increases mob con-

tempt. There was much about Poe that he himself did not understand. Poe sought for something which he could never find. But so have other artists. And it happens that the something which one admires most in Poe is just that something which eludes one! No, Poe's loneliness in America and the past attitude of that America must be accounted for on other grounds. There were cultural reasons for his loneliness in a nation poor in its friendship for artists and untrained for either thought or appreciation of what is permanently beautiful. And there was the inevitable isolation of genius. Explicable pathological reasons there were, too, for misunderstanding on the part of his fellow men. Poe dissented from the typically American concern with the morality of beauty. With Emerson, Poe believed that beauty was its own excuse for being. Poe was not a democrat. He was an aristocrat and one of a rather narrow and hateful type. His scorn extended to others not only intellectually but also socially. A certain expression about his mouth suggests more than pride. It suggests contempt,—even the quality of a sneer. His contemporaries when they hit back so often and so hard were fighting, not only a mind infinitely their superior, but even more a social attitude which was ungenerous and unforgivable. It is not drink which made Poe despicable. That made him a tragic figure.

Poe said that the secret of his malady lay in Virginia's prolonged illness. Certainly she was a long time a-dying, and Poe loved her with a rapture to be measured, not by the mind, but only by those who have experienced such love. His own account is important. "You say, 'Can you *hint* to me what was the "terrible evil" which caused the "irregularities," so profoundly lamented?' Yes, I can do more than hint. This 'evil' was the greatest that can befall a man. Six years ago, a wife, whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her forever, and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. At the end of a year, the vessel broke again. I went through precisely the same scene. . . . Then again—again—and even once again, at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death—and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive—nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank—God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity. I had, indeed, nearly abandoned all hope of a permanent cure when

I found one in the *death* of my wife. This I can and do endure [Virginia died January 30, 1847] as becomes a man. It was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could *not* longer have endured without total loss of reason. In the death of what was my life, then, I received a new but—Oh, God!—how melancholy an existence."

An editor for one of the magazines, *Graham's,* on which Poe worked, wrote: "His love for his wife was a sort of rapturous worship of the spirit of beauty, which he felt was fading before his eyes. I have seen him hovering around her when she was ill, with all the fond fear and tender anxiety of a mother for her first-born—her slightest cough causing in him a shudder, a breast chill, that was visible. I rode out one summer evening with them, and the remembrance of his watchful eyes, eagerly bent upon the slightest change of hue in that loved face, haunts me yet as the memory of a sad strain. . . ." Only in a "ghoul haunted region of Weir" could beings be so degraded as to touch the beauty of Poe's home life with anything but gentle hands. Nevertheless human nature is such that this particularly idyllic and tragic little home has had to be defended again and again by those who knew it. Professor Harrison is right in saying that none but a "determined enemy" would call Willis's characterization of Poe's mother-in-law "falsetto." Maria Clemm

was indeed one of those angels upon earth, one is more likely to encounter in the body clad in a shabby dress than one is likely to see bodiless and winged in heaven. In the worn person of Mrs. Clemm, bringing to her home life all the beauty of daily service and undying love, we have a record in its beauty as immortal as Griswold's attack upon Poe was "immortal" in its infamy. She sought employment for Poe when he was too ill to seek it for himself; she nursed her invalided daughter. Accustomed to better days, she lived their impoverished life with dignity. Doing all the work of the house with her own hands, going without food she needed, seldom warmly clad, reticent about Poe's tragic hours, unswerving in her devotion to these "children" of hers, she made that little home a place of remembered charm, lovely in its cleanliness, and refinement, fragrant with its flowers. No one who had so little ever did so much with what she had as this southern gentlewoman. Of her and the home she created even Griswold has written: "I was impressed by the singular neatness and the air of refinement in his home. It was in a small house, in one of the pleasant and silent neighborhoods far from the center of the town, and though slightly and cheaply furnished everything in it was so tasteful and so fitly disposed that it seemed altogether suitable for a man of genius. For this and for most of the comforts he

enjoyed, in his brightest as in his darkest years, he was chiefly indebted to his mother-in-law, who loved him with more than maternal devotion and constancy."

His inability to resist drink may or may not have been due to the strain of Virginia's illness. When the end came and Virginia lay dying, the child lacked even blankets to cover her. She lay with her husband's greatcoat thrown over her, a big tortoise shell cat warming her breast, her mother and her husband chafing her hands and feet in the effort to bring her more warmth. As in the *Duchess of Malfi* one's thoughts cry, "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young." Maria Clemm nursed her son-in-law through the brain fever that followed Virginia's death and then in the ensuing loneliness sat with him night after night —sometimes till four o'clock in the morning—while he worked. When William Blake lay dying he turned to his beloved Katharine and said, "You have been an angel to me!" I have no doubt Edgar Poe had his moments when he knew how good and great was this hard-working worn woman who was more than a mother to him.

In Poe's weakness there was never any sensual intention. He was not seeking for pleasure,—merely for a continued working life,—for existence itself, for there can be little question but that Mrs. Shew's diagnosis of Poe's habits and conditions as due to "lesion

of one side of the brain" was correct. Even while under the influence of alcohol Poe was a gentleman. Mrs. Whitman herself contradicted the repellent tales told by Dr. Griswold of Poe's insulting behavior with her: "No such scene as that described by Dr. Griswold ever transpired in my presence. No one, certainly no woman, who had the slightest acquaintance with Edgar Poe, could have credited the story for an instant. He was essentially and instinctively a gentleman, utterly incapable, even in moments of excitement and delirium, of such an outrage as Dr. Griswold has ascribed to him. No authentic anecdote of coarse indulgence in vulgar orgies or bestial riot has ever been recorded of him. . . . During the last years of his unhappy life, whenever he yielded to the temptation that was drawing him into its fathomless abyss, as with the resistless swirl of the maelstrom, he always lost himself in sublime rhapsodies on the evolution of the universe, speaking as from some imaginary platform to vast audiences of rapt and attentive listeners. During one of his visits to this city [Providence], in the autumn of 1848, I once saw him after one of those nights of wild excitement, before reason had fully recovered its throne. Yet even then, in those frenzied moments when the doors of the mind's 'Haunted Palace' were left unguarded, his words were the words of a princely intellect overwrought, and of a heart only too sensitive and

too finely strung. I repeat that no one acquainted with Edgar Poe could have given Dr. Griswold's scandalous anecdote a moment's credence."

No, the misfortune of drug and alcohol addiction did not make Poe despicable. Except when he maligns others Poe never becomes despicable. That he should have blackened that friend, Wilmer, who was so kind to him and to his memory, should find no apologist although this act can find explanation in the fact that gross suspiciousness is one of the evidences of alcoholism. Conduct must conform for the sake of social organization or mechanism, if for no other purposes, to the uses of certain tables of weights and measures. There are many incidents in Poe's life which for pathological reasons did not conform to standards. One might long with all the ardor of ten hearts and the phlegm of ten lives to attack Dr. Griswold. But no defense of Poe's actions in writing an attack on Dr. Griswold which was at the same time praise of himself is possible. Popular opinion would say that Poe deceived and lied because he was a narcomaniac, but narcomania, like any other disease, is as often truthful as untruthful. More probably the explanation of Poe's untruthfulness lay in an untrained childhood. For with nine children out of ten, a tendency towards lying is part of the process of growth,—one of the blind efforts to become stronger than childhood really is!

There were three things against Poe: a drink inheritance, the heavy weight of a genius naturally morbid and the bitter conditions of his life. Appleton Morgan was right when he wrote that Poe's greatest crime was his poverty. And the abject extreme poverty of a man who works and works hard, even to exhaustion, as Poe did, is not the crime of the individual, never has been and never will be. It is the crime of a crudely organized society whose standard is money-value. . . . The popular conception of Poe as a moral renegade is amusing. He was, really, taking into account the facts of his life and the struggle he made, a moral hero and a very great hero. For two reasons it is useless to attempt to explain some of the censure of Poe on the ground of the "unforgivable sin of drink." In the first place all evidence goes to show that Poe drank far less than most men, but that he was incapable of carrying even a glass of wine. In the second place there have been men in this country whose known history of drink has not alienated their fellows, —rather, it has drawn men with a sense of pity towards them. No doubt Poe used himself up at times and showed it. Most men of genius have. While still young, they exhaust themselves, then later comes the goad. Poe's work is the product of his abnormality,—his longing for excitement, both mental and emotional, is part of this abnormality. The fact that Poe has

so often been attacked for drunkenness must be accounted for on grounds other than the weakness itself.

Poe was worth caring for; he was worth loving; it would have been worth this country's while to release his genius, to set it free from the fear of starvation for those he loved even more than for himself. No rhetoric, Christian or otherwise, is necessary in order to see the value of love in such lives as those of James Thomson and Poe. Their tragedy was twofold: that they were victims of a crude social mechanism as blind as unintelligent evolution and that they were at the end in want of that close love which might have meant salvation for both health and work. Mrs. Whitman might have brought such love to Poe and she did not. She was, it may be, overprecious in the value she set upon what she would have called her "soul;" and prized her own life too highly. In any event she could have held Poe back from destiny awhile. And if, then, she had gone down with him the world would have loved and respected her, not less, but more. Poe was worth loving, and he was not only lovable but also loving. In that letter, which is a deep cry, Maria Clemm wrote to N. P. Willis when she heard of her son's death, is the only record we need: "Say what an affectionate son he was to me, his poor desolate mother."

Letters from the last years of Poe's life make an

almost unbroken record of ruin, poverty, disease. He was poor and he was ill. I recall one letter in which he wrote to Griswold asking for a loan of $5.00. America might well hang her head that her greatest should so often be so hunger-bitten—her Poes, her Whitmans, her Laniers,—so many of her finest artists to-day. Edgar Allan Poe did indeed run his whole race in a sack. Very humorous to see a human race so run and such a genius in the bag! There are two aspects to this sordid tragedy of our greatest American poet "cooped" at the end for political purposes, drugged, dying alone in a Baltimore hospital. One of the aspects—American responsibility—is never referred to. James Thomson writing about Walt Whitman said: "I simply express my wonder and sorrow that the Americans, with their well earned reputations for generosity, should allow such a great and noble public benefactor, prematurely broken down by the tremendous exertions of his public beneficence, to languish and die in neglect and poverty." We do it still in all the arts: so far experience teaches us nothing. Yet must we make the same mistakes as an old country, kill our Chattertons, thwart our Burnses, crucify our Shelleys, starve our Thomsons? Must civilization go on forever sending its best forward with bruised feet, in rags, starved, and all too often maddened by those elementary needs which their very genius makes them

unable to cope with? We have indeed made a fair beginning with our Poes and Laniers and Blakelocks! We are a generous and a new world. Have we no fairer hope to hold out to our artists than what they have received in an old world?

III

DISASTER AND POETRY

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DISASTER AND POETRY

"Yes, here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech, and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all disastrous fight,
I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths though out of sight."

City of Dreadful Night.

POETRY takes both the foot of the tight-rope walker and an astronomer's eye for the stars, —and men grow dizzy. The question is whether the type of man who is perfectly equipped to enjoy life would write poetry? Whether it is not very often —if not always—suffering or disease or disaster which brings to him the will to create? Is there not in the very act of creation a setting aside of that greater quality which is life itself? Will not the arts mark for their own that man or woman upon whom meditation, hesitation, even crippling, has laid its pause and its silence? One greater than James Thomson wrote:

"Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

It is possible that in the assumption that a man's work is greater than himself—that is, that art is of more value than life itself—there is some emphasis which leads to disease, and something mawkish, a little flabby, bandying, as this assumption does, the words "divine," "inspiration," "genius."

Of the custodian values of poetry to society none is greater than the truth. Any other emphasis results either in sentimentalizing life or in the arrival of Mrs. Grundy ready to go into action, her awe-inspiring Victorian bonnet tied firmly under her plump and respectable chin. It was the shadow of this bonnet thrown across his love for beauty—his poetry—which made Swinburne, the bright-haired, dance and chatter and spout insult and outrage. It is a shadow hard for any poet, any lover of truth and beauty, to endure. Yet, indeed, the very conditions which have created the best in the arts, have made Mrs. Grundy possible. It is only when men have in their development achieved some leisure that she walks in. Against all the laws of material progress, art does not spring out of want. It takes its rise in margins of energy and leisure, for it is spiritual and its law the reverse of that which is material. Men have to possess, grow a little ennuyé with their possession, consider, and then and then only, when the joys of gross material wealth are already lessening, does art come into its own.

James Thomson frequently refers to himself as a cynic. Cynicism is broken down idealism,—spavined idealism, something that goes with a limp. If the cynic displays his troubles in action by being unable to bear the load or strike the pace, the firm idealist (who often knows as much or more than the cynic about the miserableness and miseries of human nature but who has seen beyond these things), can both strike and keep, then Thomson is one. Yet he has social imagination that might have led him on to considerable power. His interpretation, however, of Carlyle's doctrine of work is sufficient to point to his unmuscular social conscience. In a sense for one of his habit of mind, too congenial was his study of Dean Swift. It confirmed in him, without in the least adding to his real experience, what might be called intellectual pessimism. Behind the *Speedy Extinction* essay and other essays imitative of Swift there is weak cynicism, no originality—for it is in the manner and mode of Dean Swift with a specious touch of madness added to it. Even its insanity is imitation. At best it has a note of wistfulness. Unquestionably James Thomson suffered. Unquestionably this was a subject of importance to him. One feels, however, as if he had been reading a great deal of Swift and sympathizing with what he read. Not only the title and the mood but the very rhythm of the words is Swiftean. Nevertheless this work has neither

the coarseness nor the original power of the Irish Dean. That terrible, savage earnestness of Dean Swift which lifts it beyond the pale of questions of good taste is everywhere lacking. And, it should not be forgotten, that James Thomson delighted equally in Shelley, the Social Apostle, for whom a loaf of bread was all the feast required, and Saint-Amant, scribbling, liquor-soaked, in a vile French pothouse.

Probably Thomson would never have set himself whole-heartedly to any reform, political, social, moral. Even where he gives us a social document, as, for example, in *Low Life,* it is somehow not of value. Only in his greatest poem, *The City of Dreadful Night,* do we have material power. Where his social feeling is valuable it is because it is a matter of experience and not of theory. At least Thomson is never busy with flimsy optimism about the diseases and miseries and tragedies of human life. Unlike his other poems, the social significance of *The City of Dreadful Night* is considerable. Poets are not only the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," they are also the greatest sociologists. As a rule leaders in a cause lack ability to see two sides. But Thomson's inability to give himself to a cause might be intellectual honesty, or again it might be lack of moral conviction. Which? Some sense of futility there was about him. Was that a sense, that of struggling against his own weakness or

against fate? There is a difference, though the two merge mysteriously into each other in every life. Is this acceptance of bad luck or trifling with fate because success does not seem worth while fighting for? Thomson's nature had not enough spiritual energy to keep its affairs moving forward. Much of the weary thinker there was about him. What had he to spare for causes or for others? In the impulse for service, in Shelley, something clear, swift, keen, there was. No mistakes could obscure that firm and bright intention. In James Thomson the intention is blurred, uncertain, aimless. This self-conscious grinning of the cynic at the weakness of humanity has nothing to do with God. Such grinning is the acknowledged futility of self.

Social belief—faith in the value of human life and human endeavor—goes deeper than habit, for it has the power to shape habit. Some enervation there was at work in the very engine room of Thomson's thinking. In his work and that of other poets at that time, I think, it was a form of sentimentalism that had misled into pessimism,—all the silly, shallow, tinsely, egotistical hopes which, when science took them away, their owners cried out for like spoiled children and would not be comforted. This curious attitude toward science can be seen in Thomson's *Naked Goddess.* Man suffers from the assumptions of his own egotism. He assumes that the universe is made for him, and then,

because he cannot have all he wants, he sets up the demon of pessimism for himself and others. Human nature is discontented often because it longs to possess everything for all time, and attempts to put eternity in its pocket. This is but one expression of the grasping or greedy character of egotism to which, all too often, the word "spiritual" is applied. Any man with any tragic experience whatsoever judging life solely or largely by his personal knowledge of it, is bound to be a pessimist. James Thomson writes in *Essays and Phantasies:* "Having made us take part in this poor puzzling game of life, she has taken care that all the rules shall be unfavorable to us: the cards are marked, the dice are loaded, we are always swindled." But this assigns conscious intention to that which is without intention. In a healthy creature the mere organic possession of life is not a little gift, not a little pleasure. Why all this railing at life by these overdeveloped egotists,—not only these individual tragedies like this of James Thomson, but all these rancorous disillusioned figures, for example, of Conrad's? A patient study of science could tell a man something about those pleasures which he may legitimately expect,—and about the inevitable! One can believe in God without deciding what it is God shall do for one. There is precisely nothing of that fine, steady, healthful spirit of inquiry, science has brought us, that courageous

spirit which can set aside the whimperings of egotism and face facts. This is the trouble with narrow expressions of religion, such as the faith of the Irvingites, the faith of Thomson's mother and therefore of inescapable influence upon Thomson. They plot out all the inches of heaven and decide upon the unknown and the unknowable.

Henry Salt's Biography starts with the preconceived idea that Thomson's pessimism is the all-dominant note of his life and his work. To this end all information is bent. By actual count there are more poems expressing joy than pessimism in his poetry. The distinction is a distinction in force and not a numerical difference. The strongest of his poems—those alone which matter very much to posterity—are pessimistic. The deep-seatedness of this attitude towards life is incontrovertible but it is not without contradiction. In writing to George Eliot, who had made grateful acknowledgment of *The City of Dreadful Night,* Thomson said: "I certainly have an affectionate and even joyful recognition of the willing labors of those who have striven to alleviate our lot, though I cannot see that all our efforts have availed much against the primal curse of our existence." It is possible to apply to Thomson's pessimism the word "pathological." But if this is done, it should be remembered that there are types of optimism equally pathological which are due

to the quick-burning of disease. For example, the buoyant hopefulness created by tuberculosis. The causes for Thomson's pessimism were several: his inheritance, sorrow which came to him in the loss of his love, physical and mental suffering, a generous and sensitive imagination which saw the bitter lot of multitudes of the unfortunate, constant anxiety about his own financial condition, and defective energy, which broke down whenever too great strain was put upon it.

He valued his own intellectual liberty greatly. More than once bitter and true is the penetration of his wit as, for example, in his essay on *The Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery*. Fearless he is, too. "Christianity," he writes, "was founded by the poor Jew Jesus (not at all the same person as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, with whom he has been commonly and stupidly confounded, but indeed an immensely better character than the said Lord and Saviour)." So in a phrase, does he brush aside the accretions of men's selfishness, vanity and cowardice. He will attack the most powerful in the world of art with an amiable ferocity that leaves nothing to be desired, at least in courage, and which very often tells the truth. Thomson places *The Lotus Eaters* as the best work "of our weak and exquisite Tennyson." This is fearless criticism with a grain of truth in it. With no less fearlessness does he tilt at Longfellow: "The sublime *Excel-*

sior is very popular at present, but I doubt whether any man (soft curates, Sunday school teachers, and tea meeting muffs who think beer and tobacco certain perdition, excepted) ever read the adventures of its lofty hero without ejaculating, "The ineffable ass! The infernal idiot!" Although James Thomson thinks along his own lines, he is, too, thoroughly British in his sharing of insular prejudices: he refers to one idea of Emerson's as "sheer vulgar Yankee-republican." His attitude towards Americans—based on a few months spent in the wilds of Colorado—is the usual one. Beginning with the flaying of our vulgarity, he follows in the footsteps of Dickens, Matthew Arnold, and our other appreciative guests, who unlike Bryce who knew his America before he wrote about it, come determined to find us English because a handful of brave and splendid Englishmen came here in the early seventeenth century. Finding us a vast and bewildering conglomerate of an age in social geology whose forces they do not understand, and whose forces we ourselves cannot understand, they call names rudely and take their British playthings and go home. Thomson, in common with his fellow countrymen, never misses a shot at Government as represented by a harmless king or queen (their monarchical fangs having been drawn by the British people themselves). This is the national English shooting gallery,—these the royal bull's eyes.

While in common with his fellow countrymen, Thomson avoids some topics of greater importance than kings and queens, he shouts in praise of John Barleycorn. Yet—probably for want of a balance wheel—most of Thomson's power came to nothing. In his personal life he rejected the friendship of the one man who stabilized him, who kept his forces in any sense directed and ordered. To have cast aside such a friend as Charles Bradlaugh as Thomson did, after so many years of friendship, was indeed neurotic folly of the worst order. Nothing could so point to his central instability as the fact of this deed. In a cause or a friendship that was his, Bradlaugh was a man of the highest integrity, of the greatest generosity, of absolute fearlessness. Even his enemies had to admit the fine quality of Bradlaugh. The only thing which can be said for Thomson is that he was so ill that he knew not what he did,—and that already he had turned his face towards death.

Personal power must not be confused with Thomson's position as an artist. There can be no question but that he had in distinguished measure personal attraction, a sort of hypnotic influence over all human beings who came into contact with him. It is interesting to see the way in which this legend of James Thomson has been woven! The man of genius who has done so much great work that was unappreciated. The

legend is due to the magnetism of his lovable personality, the loving indiscrimination of his editors and biographers, and the tragedy of his own life. He did a few poems of the second or third rank: *In the Room, The City of Dreadful Night, Insomnia.* A few of England's best, like Meredith, Rossetti and George Eliot, found power in this poetry, and a few of the world's best men and women always will, however unfulfilled that power may be. Nevertheless I feel that this lure of his personality has done more than anything else to invalidate the work of contemporary criticism of Thomson.

Thomson was so unspoiled by the attention of his friends. There was nothing that they could do which could have made him conceited or egotistical. Of that saturnalia for position, that "scalping" of every person or opportunity within reach of the literary scalping knife he would have nothing to do. Methodical in his habits, orderly by nature, hard-working, only the inroads of his disease could destroy his sturdy efficiency. His education was self-acquired and acquired in the face of constant poverty and in darkest drudgery. He was not in a hurry to rush into print. This may have been due to his lack of business instinct, but it was more probably the result of his innate modesty. I think modesty is one of the qualities which is most lovable in James Thomson. He possessed it with such

grace, such a sense of humor, humor that did not desert him even in his most abject moments:

"Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief,
O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief.
Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
'Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind.'"

There was a certain natural gayety and sweetness in his sense of humor that never turned acrid. When there was opportunity his capacity for enjoyment was very great. Even in 1881 within a year of his death, on the very margins of his fighting powers and the dark end, his sense of humor is still bubbling in a letter written to his sister-in-law Mrs. John Thomson: "I quietly take things as they come, and quietly let things go as they go, fortifying myself with that saying of the philosopher that it matters not in this vale of tears whether we wipe our eyes with a silk or cotton handkerchief, or blink through tortoise-shell or gold-rimmed glasses." Rarely has such a sense of humor been coupled with so much sympathy for human suffering, so keen a sense of the pitilessness of human fate, so awful and inevitable personal anguish so bravely born.

Intemperance first becomes evident in his life in 1855. He was then twenty-one years old and Matilda Weller had been dead three years. Sorrow he knew and was always to know, but actual melancholy took up its dwelling with him some two years after 1855. It is plain that the evidence of indulgence in liquor comes early,—the first open signs of that dipsomania which to my mind was beyond any question an "hereditary entailment." A secondary or auxiliary disease may have been the ingrowing disease of self-distrust which pressed upon him nervously until his balance tipped still further. Indeed this self-distrust may have been one factor in his modesty. Who shall say where the one begins and the other ends? In many poems, in many essays, the British glorification of grog is present. Such tragedies as his are inevitable in a land which supports even its church in part from the proceeds of drink.

His mother was a neurotic *religieuse* of the Non-Conformist type. The instability that goes with this form of religious experience is too well known to demand analysis. The background of his home life was superstition, disease, poverty, intemperance. Thomson recognized in himself a tendency to morbid religious emotions. It was the loss of his religious faith, about 1857, which, as much as anything else, settled upon him the constitutional melancholy from

which he never recovered. From an "Irvingite" mother to Charles Bradlaugh, the atheist, is a swing of the pendulum. And I am inclined to think that these extremes were characteristic of James Thomson's temperament. They certainly define his possibilities. There is, even, a certain "intemperance," if it may be so expressed, about such absolute extremes. Sorry material is the broken record we have of his increasing ill-health; of his "attacks"; of the sunstroke he suffered while doing journalistic work in Spain (during that prostration part of *The City of Dreadful Night* was worked out); pitiful records from time to time of his selling the books from his small library in order to get money for food; of "moods" in which he knew all too well that common sense was about to be thrown; of changes of employment and of the instability of his habits; accounts of his intemperance and lack of self-control; evidences of the oncoming of his attacks; and then the neural explosion,—and one appalling outbreak with its insult to his friends, the Barrs, who would so gladly have forgiven him. His letter to the Barrs written in April—he died the first week in June —1882, shows the central dignity of Thomson.

To the psychopathologist these data are all familiar, —the old, old story of disaster—and there is no need to repeat them in their heart-breaking detail. But it is ridiculous to say, as one critic does, that Thomson

"at length resorted to stimulants as a desperate escape from their memory,"—that is, the memory of privation and poverty. Who was poorer than William Blake in shillings or richer in temperance and beauty? Critics who reason this way do not understand the disease of dipsomania. Nor is there any fruitful comparison to be drawn between Thomson and Poe. The one was a sturdy personality eaten into by a slowly encroaching asthenia; the other was neurotic in every fibre of his make-up. Men do not talk about a human being who has tuberculosis as if he had failings. He has a disease and they know it. The dipsomaniac too, has a disease and they should know it. Thomson's character was naturally constant to others as well as to himself.

If through his inheritance there was some enervation undermining the strength of his life and so that of his poetry and prose, too, it is important that it should be understood. Something of the same weakening in his social credo was, I believe, at work also in his love and, through its loss, his experience of sorrow. This sorrow is something more than youth's classic despair at death,—its shudder as the dark shadow falls across its path. This shudder is something more than that ignorance of youth which knows nothing of the law of gravity the ripened apple follows when it falls, but sees between life and death only a separation which

does not exist. Somehow that energy which, under usual or normal circumstances acts as a converter, he lacked. The study of his love for Matilda Weller from any point of view is incredibly difficult—forbidden in the minds of many—yet unavoidable, for it is a shaping power almost from first to last in his life. In a sense this problem must remain a battleground for all lovers or students of James Thomson, with hostile camps of realists and symbolists.

Was it not Lafcadio Hearn who wrote what all the world knows: that in the love season there is seen the best of another human being? The story of the Phœnix which later gets up out of the ashes of disillusionment is another story. But, for human comfort, it is often more beautiful. In this resurrection—this Easter Day for all great loves—are the triumphs of hard idealism,—of idealism that is moral. One has the right to wonder what the history of James Thomson in this emotional cycle would have been, for out of such experience is wrought the dream which endures. It is all too evident that intellectually, socially, personally, he had not in him those sinews which make for lasting dreams. The dream and the function of art are, it may be, identical: they imagine better conditions than those which exist in the world and so prepare a way for the coming of something better. For the moment let it be said that Matilda Weller lived, that

their courtship was followed by marriage. The perfect joy of the love period is in a certain sense an illusion. Most of what lovers feel has no basis in fact. It is not therefore perhaps any the less real. And it is assuredly of great power biologically. Beauty and greatness are imagined which do not exist to the extent they are conceived. The ethical influence is just as operative as if these virtues were as complete as they are thought to be. The new sense of power is authentic,—again biologically an inscrutable law behind laws that are explicable. The period of passion is a period of untried idealism. The leverage of this idealism is tremendous. So is the inevitable blow of disillusionment tremendous. It is the moment which tests the moral centering of a human being as no other moment in life. What would that moment have done to or for James Thomson? These are the questions which Meredith partly ignores and partly recognizes when he wrote after Thomson's death: "He probably had, as most of us have had, his heavy suffering on the soft side. But he inherited the tendency to the things which slew him. And it is my opinion that, in consideration of his high and singularly elective mind, he might have worked clear of it to throw it off, if circumstances had been smoother and brighter about him. For thus he would have been saved from drudgery, have had time to labor at conceptions that needed time

for the maturing and definition even before the evolvement of them. He would have had what was also much needed in his case, a more spacious home, a companioned life, more than merely visiting friends, good and true to him though they were. A domestic center of any gracious kind would have sheathed his overactive, sensational imaginativeness, to give it rest, and enable him to feel the delight of drawing it forth bright and keen of edge." These are the best and wisest words that have been written about James Thomson. Yet I cannot agree with them.

Youth spends all its strength and makes most of its mistakes in trying to come into closer contact with the lives of others, trying indeed to escape into the life of another,—the age old presumption of youth with its bubble of possession and its obliviousness to that separateness, that "deep ordained" strangeness we bear one to another. This is the solitude which comes with the years. How would the nature of James Thomson have borne this inevitable realization? What would it have done to the balance of Thomson's forces? Sent them forward as a blow sends a valiant nature forward? Or struck them down as a blow will do to a nature less valiant? The outlook for dipsomania is not good,—and his was a genuine case of dipsomania, an entailment from his father. If Matilda Weller had lived, would not the struggle have involved two rather than

setting free one? Would his have been the commonplace heroism which knows that it is harder to live and make the best of life than to die and find escape? It is not unwelcome to the human heart, whether English or American or Italian, or of whatsoever nationality, to believe in these eternal loves however unfounded on experience, fact, or vision they may be. It should be remembered here, though, that Thomson failed invariably in every one of his business responsibilities. The wife and children might have meant simply a larger and more tragic failure. It is not possible to assert that they would inevitably have meant success and happiness. The way in which his mind returns to Matilda as life goes on is just the psychology of the man dying in the desert of thirst, in his eyes the mirage of a remembered oasis. Matilda was fourteen when she died and Thomson was eighteen. G. W. Foote writes: "I do not agree with Mr. Dobell in regarding this bereavement as the *cause* of his lifelong misery. She was, I hold, merely the peg on which he hung the raiment of his sorrow; without her, another object might have served the same purpose. He carried with him his proper curse, constitutional melancholia." The nature and the symbol of sorrow in Thomson's poetry assuredly have the quality of an *idée fixe* with its touch of the abnormal. Even his very pseudonym "B. V." (Bysshe Vanolis) "Bysshe"

commemorates Shelley and "Vanolis" Novalis the German lyric poet, Friedrich von Hardenberg, who lost his beloved, also named Matilda. One feels that this carefully maintained devotion after death has in it the quality of imitation and that it is shot through, not with fact and experience and a great vision of love as part of life, but with sentimentality. There is some delegated emotion here not wholly his own.

This quality of imitation is felt in James Thomson's art. His early poetry shows no approach, no traits of emotion, no thought different from any other young poet adequately gifted with sensuous perceptions. There are immaturities in Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, in their earliest poetry, but great gifts too. In James Thomson's *Juvenilia* there are immaturities but no great gifts. Thomson is not to be blamed for the actual presence of some of these poems in his collected work. Every young artist sins for the benefit of the fireplace. But editors who are likely to include such exercises of the young poet should be restrained or themselves put into the fireplace. These *Juvenilia* in essays and verse might be entitled "Echoes from Swift, Keats, Shelley, Arnold, Rossetti, and Tennyson." Even the very titles of the essays are imitative—as, for example—*Proposals for the Speedy Extinction of Evil and Misery* with its Swiftlike sound; and of his poems, to take a single illustration, *Ronald and Helen.*

It would seem that many who bear the name of poet exercise what must be called the executive, which in art is craftmanship, rather than the creative faculty. William Morris has power to swing and shape lines, to assemble, to retell. He can scarcely be said to create. The creative faculty is something deeper than the executive: it is slow of growth, stamped with originality, marked often by inequalities. There is a pleasant executive faculty in Thomson's *Weddah, Vane's Story,* and other poems. The bulk of Thomson's work is more extensive than that of Keats. It cannot be said that there is not enough by which to judge it. Here is nothing, unless it be by imitation of those flame-shod feet of Shelley, nothing of the clairvoyant transcendentalism of Wordsworth, nothing of the phantasmagoric power of Coleridge, in their youth. And no where in this young poetry is there a love poem so perfect as Keat's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.* I do not find anything worthy the name of "great" either in promise or in achievement in James Thomson's poetry except *In the Room, The City of Dreadful Night,* possibly *Insomnia. Up the River, Weddah, Vane's Story,* and a few other poems which have been so exaggeratedly praised are attractive here and there—charming poetry it might be called, but assuredly not considerable. Some critics of James Thomson have been too trustful of what others have said.

Even in progression and grouping, as in *The Dead Year,* as well as in word and sound, many of his poems bear every mark of close imitation of Shelley. But where Shelley blazes cometlike or is ethereal, Thomson is confused or high-falutin' or both. Yet Thomson was twenty-seven when he wrote his poem about *Shelley* and thirty when he wrote *Ronald and Helen.* In other words at an age when not only Shelley's youthful work but *all* his work was done. Thomson wrote with the uncertain hand of the tyro. At twenty-seven he was one year older than Keats when all Keat's work was finished. His attempt at Shelley translucence, the boat, the sea, the storm, the phantoms, the sense of being driven and hunted, the hysterical despair, all are dyed in Shelley's color of word and thought. In *The Doom of a City* the lyrics and the long-drawn-out cadence of "Oh, wait!" are unmistakably Shelley-like. Even the quick change from one stanza form to another is imitative of Shelley in his longer work. I suppose there is a degree beyond which imitation is not a wholesome sign. In my opinion Thomson reached and passed that degree.

The vocabulary of these Shelley imitations is interesting. Thomson gives again so many of Shelley's actual words and phrases: as, for example, in the poem called *Shelley*:—"vultures of despair," "fierce ambition," "Promethean gloom," "vision," "universal

ether," "life and light and music," "heavy with anguish," "blind with blood and tears," "pant after them," and so on. He "swoons," of course, like Shelley. It is not unpleasant to find Shelley "swooning," —he should to be Shelley. And he was so very charming. But this compact muscular little poet with his touch of the Cockney, that is different! In Thomson's case the swoons "melt him." They never did melt Shelley: he continued to soar. But, somehow, in *Ronald and Helen,* one feels as if the liquefaction of James Thomson had become vast, almost final. Possibly it is only the liquefaction of youth.

He used words and phrases Shelley could not under any circumstances have used, "paths steep and drear," "happy home," "laggard feet," "healing balm," "billows rage," "tempests blow," "pure peace below," "harp strings," "palm branch," "noble fight," "enduring all," "holy visions blest," "sharp wounds," "love and life and bliss,"—undoubtedly Irvingite influence. One is not without a sense of wicked amusement in contemplating Shelley strewn over with all this wreckage of a sentimental, outworn hymnology! This collection of phrases is sufficient to prove that if on one who had capacity for powerful poetry, sentimental hymns could have so disastrous an effect, their harmfulness to those with less capacity is too widespread to measure. The time should come when anything so

important to the human race as its hymns should be censored. In his poem called *Suggested by Matthew Arnold's Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,* Thomson gravely discusses "Conquerors of the Promised Land." Imagine Arnold's state of mind upon discovering this introduction of the "Promised Land" into his thought and his poetry! And he indulges in such Victorianisms as "feeble limbs" when he means weak legs, and such verbal properties as "fountain" are never long absent from his poems,—not even from *The City of Dreadful Night.* In the Shelley imitations the last injury to those who love words sensitively is given in *Ronald and Helen* where Thomson writes: "Life's faded flowers." Wordsworth never talked about "Life's faded flowers." Shelley never did. Keats never did. One can only wish that nobody ever had!

He was a man thirty years old when he wrote some of this. It is totally without distinction. One reads on and on wearily wondering what much of it is about; nothing clear-etched; nothing firm,—just "poetry" that beats its varying rhythms with the help of trite phrases, tedious sentimentality, blurred meanings. In the lesser poems the only memorable passages are those which have the strength of experience. It is as if at once his verse becomes better where suffering cuts into him and mixes with him the only originality

he possesses. As suffering creates his greatness, fustian phrases and cliché words drop away. Atrocities, too, there are, the odious pausing for a pun in the midst of some solemn thought. In art the trivial almost vulgar touch on a great subject is not lightly forgiven. And it should never be forgotten in any appraisal of James Thomson as an artist that in *Vane's Story* he was capable of such a line as "The music 'gan again arise." Beating on a tin can could not be worse. Or those atrocious lines from *Ronald and Helen:*

> "But, O my steamer, how you crawl!
> I would your horse-power were a horse indeed,
> Thin-flanked and spur-able!"

They were followed on the next page by:

> "A letter she had read a hundred times,
> And still found always new,—like some old song,
> Some old sweet song of simple passionate rhymes,
> And more than mortal tenderness—a lay
> Fit for a wedding and a dying day."

This is good, musical, simple, genuine, very human. One remembers as one reads the music of Wordsworth's *Solitary Reaper:*

> "Will no one tell me what she sings?—
> Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
> For old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago."

And the comparison still leaves one with a liking for Thomson's lines.

One feels everywhere the loose articulation of these poems, their flabby sinews, their anemic blood. Of the thing that is hard or clear or perfectly shaped his poems have nothing. Like the poetry of William Morris, they come too easily. Thomson labels his divisions Part I, Part II, Part III, and so on in *Ronald and Helen.* But they divide nothing. There is not enough structure to mark anything by division. He passes from one lyric form to another. But that too means nothing. He was writing this poem between the ages of 27 and 30. Had he been a great artist, having finished it at 30, he would have flung it away. In that Thomson destroyed personal papers which he thought might embarrass others he was a gentleman in the only and democratic sense in which that word is valid for an American. Confidence in him as an artist would be greater if he had destroyed such lethal stuff as some of his verses are.

So much of the speech of James Thomson is of the old and tattered garments of an outworn poetry,—or supposedly "poetical" speech. It is difficult to analyze why all this seems so feeble. It is not alone that it is unforgivably sentimental but it seems so without point. It rumbles with sound and rolls on and on as if the ear of the one who made it reveled in its empty reverbera-

tions. There is, however, a kind of wide-mouthed emptiness of meaning about many of the poems that makes one feel alcohol already at work blurring thought and outlines of form, nevertheless boisterously congratulating itself on the achievement of great work. This is the old, old trick of overstimulation.

There is about Thomson's imitations of Tennyson a certain "accepted" use of words; the tawdry domestic; the vulgar Cockney,—a sort of unprivileged Tennysonianism, these lodging house miller's daughters, these inexpensive princesses,—this well-bustled and well-corseted muse. True, in Thomson's *A Real Vision of Sin,* we find him throwing himself against Tennyson. But he is more often imitative than critical of him. Curiously enough the author of *The City of Dreadful Night* was capable of close absorption through Tennyson and other poets not only of that sentimentality with which we seek to put blinders on the truth, but also of trite optimistic moralizing,—a type of sentimental poem so dear to the heart of the English nation that it might be called a "box office" success! In *Bertram* he wrote:

> "My mind, long world-filled, was empowered to see
> That Life has sacred mysteries unrevealed,
> And grander trusts than Earth and Time can yield."

This is indeed one of those platitudes which leave one with nothing to say! It was against the sentimental

moralizing characteristics of English poetry that Thomson rebelled, yet he was capable of this! It is the misfortune of the imitative tendency that it is altogether too likely to retain the weakness rather than the strength of that which it follows, for strength is largely self-made. Of the great artist at work, as Tennyson was, Thomson seems to have perceived but little,—not even the delicacy with which Tennyson will grip some detail of the commonplace.

Other influences besides Shelley, Arnold, Tennyson, we have in Thomson's poetry: Poe, Blake, the Bible, Keats, Rossetti, Browning, and, it is said, Meredith. Of Poe's *Raven* there is Thomson's constant use of its refrain; of Blake here or there a bit of philosophy or the lisp of some little lyric or such a line as this from *The City of Dreadful Night,* "If tigers burn with beauty and with might;" of the Bible, its rhythm in some stately line of poetry or prose; of Keats some gleam of jeweled color; of Rossetti some suggestion of the great artist's sense of form, as in *The Purple Flower of the Heather.* On Thomson's poetry, Browning's influence is not marked, but the amount of prose Thomson devotes to Browning is large. I do not know that I can account for the fact that there is so little evidence of Browning's influence in Thomson's poetry when in his thoughts he is so prominent. Of Meredith's influence I find nothing but the record of Thom-

son's great and deserved admiration for him. And everywhere there is evidence that Thomson was reading and reading in the advance guard of the masters,—for himself "discovering" his Meredith, Garth Wilkinson, Ruskin, George Eliot, before they had become public property.

Thomson tells us that the only true or inspired poetry is always from within, not from without,—that is, a good poem cannot be created with the mind alone. "Ah then," we say, "so he knew that!" Yes, he knew that,—he knew several of the inmost secrets of great creative work. In his essay on *Whitman* he wrote: "To speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and *insouciance* of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art." This is wonderful and true. But it was never true of Thomson except where, as in the case of *The City of Dreadful Night,* he paid his very life for what was produced. He sins so often as an artist. The words he uses are sometimes as ludicrous as buttons sewed on in wrong places. The unusual word in Thomson seldom becomes part of the whole garment of the artist. Thomson shows himself rather the amateur at work. Let it be remembered that the word means "loving," for Thomson loved what he did. He is like a child making a collection of buttons that please him

for their individual colors or shapes. But like poppy seed for narcotizing his meaning, he scatters such words as "treen," "brigue," "pereceant," "eyne," "colure," "ænomel" about in his poems,—delightful, no doubt, as a course in Middle English or in "Gothick" influence, but no part of the texture of his poem as such. There is a fine verbal simplicity about good poetry. Yet Thomson seeks trophies of the erudite or the obsolete. There is nothing applied externally in great poetry to its fabric woven in one piece from heart and mind. A word is precious because of its human value. It can have no other value; in science as service; in common speech as community of interest; in art as revelation and healing. The instant a word is so used that it robs its context of *human* value, that instant there is loss of power. Indeed his "error" as artist goes deeper than the attachment of button trophies to the garment of his work. For me the great error of even his greatest work lies in a certain point of view, for in the very instance of his most impressive poem, *The City of Dreadful Night,* I detect the quality of one who sees life as an intellectually gifted and tragically condemned member of the Salvation Army might see it, rather than as pure poet.

Is there some touch of the vicious quality—that is, that which is against art—of sentimentalized gospel hymns in James Thomson's poetry? There is much

to be said for caste and class in the leadership of the arts. People *will* choose what they understand. And if to the majority a sentimental hymnology appeals, then that will be the language of its current poetry. Thomson's only American biographer, Edward Meeker, speaks of the "sorry affairs the present pays for and the future forgets." The number of these "affairs," certainly, is lessened in a society whose emphasis has progressed at least a little beyond the commercial. The external as well as internal injury possible for poetry is greater and more frequent than the injury possible to music, for as an art-medium poetry is inferior to music and therefore more vulnerable. It matters more into whose hands poetry falls, both in the creating and the appreciating, than is the case with any other popular art. In a country with a population so mixed as ours, leadership—leadership for the arts at least—may be "safest" with privilege. It is possible its dominion would not have the promise of being so mighty. What a nation whose hero is Abraham Lincoln can do for poetry is on the way to be revealed. In our poetry a few certainties emerge: a gait that is freer; a step swifter; breathing deep, strong, noisy; energy that breaks away from all conventions of a social caste system; a disposition to tattoo the face of poetry under the delusion—common it would seem to civilization (?) as well as barbarism—

that disfigurement, whether in freakish line or high heel, is beauty; methodistical joy shouting with abandon about vast forces, social, geographical, spiritual—in short a chorus of western voices all too often offensive to the weak gentilities of left-over British Victorians and to Mrs. Grundy.

Assuredly in England leadership in the arts has been safest with privilege. This becomes evident in the study of James Thomson, not because it educates the individual, but rather because in the arts as a whole it inhibits certain tendencies and eliminates individualism. Had Shelley shared with Thomson even the dipsomania that was Thomson's curse, he could not at certain points have used his vocabulary; nor could he have thought of pleasure in the same terms. His traditions forbade anything so lacking in taste. To think brought James Thomson despair. For consolation all too often James Thomson has nothing but some Cockney toys of vulgar pleasure,—and instinctively the American despises the Cockney as a creature deprived of freedom and grievously disfigured in speech, gait and look, by the social and economic pressure of civilization. Again and again England's social system has constricted art to the figure of this Cockney, and only "privilege" dominant has saved her poetry from widespread impairment. Repeatedly has the Cockney limitation stamped itself on poetry and prose; the worst

that Keats, Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt did; some of the best and the worst that James Thomson did. No doubt it was Thomson's training and not his personality which made his offenses possible. Like Cockney wit, something of what he writes has all too often the taint of cheap silliness. This is not necessarily the emanation of a single personality, though it is signed "B. V." This is the composite, a little degraded personality, of a whole class of people, its youth gone, conscious of a compromised spiritual rectitude, toying with deep things which youth, romance, love, a new world, would approach in all seriousness. Here in this attitude is the constitution of death not youth. The days of Elizabeth are gone. The days of Wordsworth are passed. The torch is in other hands. Its flame travels westward still, with the sound of many feet seeking a new and better world.

There are several things no spirited human being wishes to share with others: his love, his charities, his sins. If he would withhold the first and the last, let him not write poetry. Though no biography of him exist or ever exist, men will know all they need to know of what has been nearest to him and weakest in him. Poetry is always an "intimate" moment. How could it be otherwise? It therefore reveals not only the most intimate beauty of the human heart and its strength: it shows also its weaknesses and its deformities. The

old theocracy of art criticism must go,—this refusal to discuss man or god. The poet who deals not only with form but also with thought and emotion must expect interest from others in his own thought and emotion. By the very nature of his art he becomes personal possession to his public, large or small. If he were a potter, it might be different. Poetry does not just happen; it is as much the result of a cause as is the firelight. We wish to know what are the facts that produce certain types of poetry or certain poems,—say, for example, *The City of Dreadful Night,* We have the right to know.

Is it accident or a sort of composite significance of all his work that so often makes a poet known chiefly by one poem? I feel that it is composite significance. In his greatest poems, *In the Room* (1867-8), *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-74) and *Insomnia* (March, 1882) James Thomson works free from imitation of any one. No, even at this instant my eyes see the form and my ears hear the cadence of the stanzas of Tennyson's *The Two Voices.* Thomson died on June 3, 1882. Between the writing of *Insomnia* and his death, he had two spring months in which to travel his *via crucis,*—April and May, months most beloved of the poets. I find nothing of James Thomson's equal to *The City of Dreadful Night* in power of thought; in impressive imagery, dull or flashing, but

always full of doom; and in sustained firmness of form. *Insomnia* touches it; *In the Room* is kin to it; but no other poem of Thomson's equals it. This thought of the "City" may be said to be peculiarly Thomson's own, unless some suggestion for it came to him through his adoration for Shelley. It haunted Thomson in *The Doom of a City,* written when he was twenty-three. It is ever present in prefigurative imagery in his essay *Our Lady of Sorrow,* written ten years before *The City of Dreadful Night.*

Thomson's master poem may have shocked his own period,—no doubt it did shock Mrs. Grundy. But there is nothing in it that would shock the most sensitive to-day. There is much in it that is heart-breaking in its revelation of the suffering of another human being. *Of the City of Dreadful Night* Meredith wrote Thomson in 1880, "I have not found the line I would propose to recast. I have found many pages that no other English poet could have written. Nowhere is the verse feeble, nowhere is the expression insufficient; the majesty of the line has always its full coloring, and marches under a banner." Passages there are which if they have counterpart or inception anywhere else in English literature I do not know where that is: the great canto, the Fourth, and the last stanza of the poem,

"The moving moon and stars from East to West
Circle before her in the sea of air;
Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest,
Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
And confirmation of the old despair."

And lines of rarely equaled beauty such as "The mighty marching and the golden burning"; and "That one best sleep which never wakes again."

It is a mystery to know why in art one thing is good and another bad. But in art it is not a problem of that which is shop-work and that which is not, so much as it is a question of that which remains plastic and that which has become fixed. So much of *The City of Dreadful Night* is the poetry of thought. In respect of its art it is a bigger poem than Tennyson's *Two Voices*. Great poetry works outward from itself. The outward movement of Tennyson's *Two Voices* is imperceptible; its self-analysis holds it in bondage. Argumentation does not make verse. But the supreme power of Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* lies in the fact that personal tragedy sets the poet free. And his line does indeed "march under a banner." But that "banner" is pessimism, sinister destiny, what you will:

"I find no hint throughout the universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme;
With infinite Mystery, abysmal, dark,
Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
For us the flitting shadows of a dream."

Yet what is this echo of a cadence heard elsewhere, of a conflict witnessed, not the same but similar; and the suggestion of that last line of Thomson's stanza somehow familiar before Thomson wrote it? Here is the answer in Tennyson's *Two Voices:*

" 'Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

'Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.' "

How does it happen that physical decay does not convince most of humanity of death? Whence the inward evidence for this denial on the edge of that grave which in life is never closed? In a certain sense—bodily at least—the end of death is to create life. Perhaps our longing for immortality is this physical fact with wings added unto it. Tennyson's *Two Voices* tells us that life and love are worth living because they continue in another world beyond the senses. Thomson

answers quite differently; and in lines that might well be satire on Tennyson:

> "It leads me back
> From this accursed night without a moon,
> And through the deserts which have else no track,
> And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
> To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:"

Or these lines strangely suggestive of Tennyson's golden art, but about the meaning of which there is no mistaking:

> "The world rolls round forever like a mill;
> It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
> It has no purpose, heart or mind or will."

Indeed *The City of Dreadful Night* might be called Thomson's answer to the material of Tennyson's *Two Voices* and *In Memoriam.* Yet out of the conflict in each of these poems how different the "voice": in the one the soul that comes to know itself through struggle, to know how distinct it is from the body, conscious of an illimitable future rending the shards of its old self for flight in an eternity of time; the other with its terrible response, waking from "day dreams to a real night" of "dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope!" Hear these two voices:

> "Cry, faint not, climb: the summits slope
> Beyond the furthest flights of hope
> Wrapt in dense cloud from base to cope."

And Thomson:

> "Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
> It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
> Then grinds him back into eternal death."

Even in this only citadel of his greatest poem—the sole creation we could hope to call wholly and adequately his own—there is too close analogy between intellectual inquiry and outward form to leave us any choice, but still to place Thomson among the imitative. How was it that Meredith, the master, did not himself feel this closeness? The correspondence between certain portions of *The City of Dreadful Night* and Tennyson's *Two Voices* is not merely that of terza rima, of a similar subject, of figures much alike. The correspondence goes deeper than that: it is dependence, —the dependence of James Thomson on Alfred Tennyson. There must always be similarities, debts of poet to poet, of thinker to thinker, even "properties" as, for example, in the pastoral. Yet there is no question of undue dependence of Shelley or Arnold, let us say, on Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus. *The City of Dreadful Night* is a more powerful poem than *The Two Voices.* Both its figures and its imaginative quality are greater. I think Thomson felt, as many have felt, the inner weakness of *The Two Voices.* Yet he had neither the intellectual nor the spiritual strength to

travel further than Tennyson. And setting his goal beyond that of Tennyson and failing to reach it, the whole poem becomes enfeebled by failure.

The City of Dreadful Night was written during periods of mental suffering but the poet was not friendless. Thomson himself said that it "was the outcome of a good deal of sleepless hypochondria suffered at various periods." There is difference of opinion regarding the influence of opium on this poem. Some writers have spoken of Thomson as an habitual opium-eater. This is assuredly a mistake. I find evidence of only occasional opium-taking in his poetry, but almost continuous evidence of the effects of alcoholism. His personal history—now locked up in the diaries in the possession of Percy J. Dobell (the oldest son of Bertram Dobell)—would, I think, if recorded at all, reveal evidence of more constant recourse to opium, probably in the form of laudanum, during the years when he was writing *The City of Dreadful Night*. In his sleepless periods he had found alcohol alone—he had gone too far with that by this time—would not serve his purposes of stupefaction, and he felt himself driven, as many another has, to the increased use of opium, which was then a common medicinal remedy given after an attack of alcoholism.

Several are the evidences of opium-taking in this great poem. That sense not only of the dragging foot

of misery but of the endlessness of time is one of the mental stigmata of opium addiction:

"The City is of Night, but not of sleep;
There sweet sleep is not for the weary brain;
The pitiless hours like years and ages creep,
A night seems termless hell. This dreadful strain
Of thought and consciousness which never ceases,
Or which some moments' stupor but increases
This, worse than woe, makes wretches there insane."

To the diseased experience of the endlessness of time this poem is one long tragic tribute. The agony of timelessness he gives in many of his poems but in none besides the *City* more strikingly than in *Insomnia*:

"The absolute of torture as of bliss
Is timeless, each transcending time and space;
The one an infinite obscure abyss,
The other an eternal Heaven of grace,—
Keeping a little lamp of glimmering light
Companion through the horror of the night,
I laid me down aghast
As *he* of all who pass death's quiet portal
Malignantly reserved alone immortal,
In consciousness of bale that must for ever last."

Here is the terrible Lazarus of Disease where Time is no more; "it is not daybreak, it is not morning; the noontide may be thousands of leagues remote, the twi-

light and the evening are immemorially overpassed." Some allowance must, of course, be made for the effect upon so sensitive an imagination of De Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis.*

In *The City of Dreadful Night* these are stanzas typical of opium work, but not very common to Thomson's poetry:

"Boats gliding like dark shadows of a dream,
Are glorified from vision as they pass
The quivering moonbridge on the deep black stream;
Cold windows kindle their dead glooms of glass
To restless crystals; cornice, dome, and column
Emerge from chaos in the splendor solemn;
Like faëry lakes gleam lawns of dewy grass.

With such a living light these dead eyes shine,
These eyes of sightless heaven, that as we gaze
We read a pity, tremulous, divine,
Or cold majestic scorn in their pure rays;
Fond man! they are not haughty, are not tender;
There is no heart or mind in all their splendor,
They thread mere puppets all their marvelous maze."

In this same poem Thomson makes direct reference to opium;

"From wandering through many a solemn scene
Of opium visions, with a heart serene
And intellect miraculously bright;
I wake from daydreams to this real night."

The phantasmagoria of *Insomnia* as the *City* is partly opium I am sure: all these monstrous shadowy forms, the rigor, the tremblings, the timelessness of time, the jarring, the cramped respiration, the chills, the sweat, the badly laboring heart, the thoughts of self-destruction, the consciousness of health lost. The thought of self-destruction haunted Thomson over many a long year yet he resisted it to the last. Shuddering nerves there are in his work. Nowhere do we get that temptation to kill himself more strongly given than *In the Room.* And nowhere is his essential sanity so evident in light, clear touch. *Insomnia* is the last of Thomson's poems except for two inconsiderable little things. The fact that Matilda is not mentioned in it does not trouble me. This poem, like *The City of Dreadful Night,* is great, partly because he has cast away all sentimentality and all illusion. Thomson wrote in the Introductory Note to *Our Lady of Sorrows* in *Essays and Phantasies:* "There is truth of winter and black night, there is truth of summer and dazzling noonday. On the one side of the great medal are stamped the glory and triumph of life, on the other side are stamped the glory and triumph of death; but which is the obverse and which the reverse none of us surely knows." On this master poem is stamped "the glory and triumph of death."

Thomson was twenty-one before he had any experi-

ence with alcohol. At twenty-three he was writing *The Doom of a City* which might be said (even as Tennyson's *Two Voices* was a preliminary study for *In Memoriam*) to be a first exercise towards his greater poem, *The City of Dreadful Night.* To set side by side passages from *The Doom of a City* (1857) and *The City of Dreadful Night* (1870-1874) with the idea of making concrete the mental stigmata of alcoholism and of limited opium-taking in conjunction with alcohol might seem like attempting the impossible. Phantasmagoric sensuality—inevitable result of alcohol upon an imaginative mind—is found in his prose as well as his poetry,—terrible passages these in their revelation of Thomson's knowledge of the evil which is of the body, but against which his whole mental make-up threw itself in vain, intolerable anguish day-long, night-long. The imagery of alcohol is distinctly more sensual than that of opium. I do not mean solely in sexual matters either, but also in greed for food and drink, violent hatred, and so on. It is as if in all physical and emotional ways alcohol emphasized the greed of egotism and its aggressive traits. In the use of tangible imagery—those things which cannot only be seen, but also touched with the hands, I think the effect of alcohol is more pronounced. It is as if alcohol had too many hands and opium were without hands altogether.

The service of such poems as these greatest poems of James Thomson's is not to be calculated in terms of health and joy but in terms of illness and sorrow. It is plain that I differ from Meredith—than with whom there is no writer of modern times I would rather agree—for I think that tragic experience was the creative reagent in James Thomson's case and that without it he would have written no great poetry. It might be said of Emily Brontë that experience played but little part in the splendor of her fragmentary work and the same might be said of other poets and novelists as well. But here and there we find a poet, a playwright, a novelist, into the chemistry of whose work experience of a particular kind falls as the only possible reagent towards achievement. Tragic as this fact may be sometimes, its tragedy belongs to the inevitable in great art. That art should be among the sacrificial professions is true in more ways than one. It was tragedy reagent that kept James Thomson from sinking into the fat lethargies of English sentimental poetry. Had destiny touched him with a gentler hand he would have sought in self-expression one of two extremes, shallow and optimistic sentimentality or mordant satire,—both moods disturbed reflexes of what is the truth. The great work—and there can be no question but that *The City of Dreadful Night* has the quality of greatness—that Thomson did was hewn out through the

agency of his own tragedy. This is a clear case of where through the reagency of tragedy disaster has *made* poetry. One has only to study the dates of Thomson's poems to see at work in them—for Thomson—the master shaping hand of his tragedy. His habits were destroying him, but they were shaping his poetry into a terrible graven image of human sorrow like unto Thomson's own. For Thomson, always, the "real night" was alcoholism, not opium taking. I feel that—if it may be said that disease can make even its pain contribute to beauty and no one has yet been able to prove that it does not—I feel that it is the morbid experience of alcohol which does more for Thomson than opium did, in any relation, in deepening, when he is at his highest as an artist, that rough magnificence of terror in his poetry. The poems he wrote while he had a fair degree of health have no value. I am drawing no conclusions. I am merely stating facts.

For all except the bigoted moralist, at certain points life becomes a sort of madness. Browning with his sanity felt this, as *Porphyria's Lover* and *Johannes Agricola* testify. Toward the end Thomson had reached an age when there might not only arise some natural process of disease but also the age when climax of some sort was inevitable. With some pathological personalities one can never tell when and to what extent the personality will break down. It depends on

the depth of the invasion of disease. Often such men and women know nothing of the body. It is as if the science of the body or the human mechanism itself did not exist. The social and individual preciousness of that less than a cubic inch of cerebral cortex, bearing, as it does, its freight of memories individual and racial, human desires and human ideals, penitence, pity, hate and love, all that composes that incorporeal something we call human personality,—this is to them a fact unknown. While they defy many or all of the laws governing the body, they will discuss with intelligence the use of rays of light as a means towards interplanetary communication! Nature has many and unguessed-at intentions among her purposes. In man she would seem to intend something intellectual. This body blind-spot among men of genius may be one of Nature's means towards achieving an end at any cost. Who knows!

It is possible that a good deal of narcotized writing has seemed beautiful because its motivating power was not understood. Certain types of insanity have from time immemorial been stamped as divine inspiration, and so worshiped, for example, take epilepsy. Temporary mental disease is not creative inspiration. The creative instinct of the mind is as normal and as much a part of the expression of life as the physical creative instinct. It is true that conditions of health

and disease mentally often merge into one another in a way that is bewildering. In the life of nature disease consumes even as in ours. Mentally, what does this mean in human experience? What is disease? Is it natural? That which takes away from the energy of the individual or the community is evil; that which adds to it is good. But in individual cases which does add more to the energy of the community, genius with some of its roots all too frequently embedded in disease, or perfect health without the genius? A dark problem and a bitter battle-ground! The taint of disease has for all except the pathologist and the psychoanalyst the lure of the mysterious and is identified too frequently with greatness which in itself it is not, although it may be correlated with greatness. Those who worship these gods in poetry and prose without taking thought, are no further advanced in the social development of an art than the primitive tribe worshiping awestruck before an epileptic chief can be said to be advanced in religious experience.

In any event, the nearer disease and death press on a sensitive mind perhaps all the more passionately does that mind press towards the consolation of art which is immortal. It was for his singer's heart Thomson cared the most. And it was his tragedy rather than anything more personal or sentimental. Even as he was tortured he sang: it is the old fable forever new,

for James Thomson belonged to the class of human beings who seem to rush from wreck to wreck of their own making and who in the process of destroying themselves gain a sort of inexplicable superpower creatively.

Towards the close of the year 1881 came a strange Indian summer of love and joy. It is curious that Thomson, very near the end of his physical endurance, exhausted and battered mentally and spiritually, could still give sympathy with so fine and sensitive a grace to others, and still find beauty and still want love as never before! It points undeniably to the inner constancy of the poor tragic heart, the nature that was his. . . . No one will ever know even half the agony of that struggle between the dominant, seen traits of James Thomson's nature and those which were hidden. His account was terrible beyond words to describe or figures to enumerate. Perhaps this is one reason why human forgiveness, mercy, kindness, love, facing the inexorable accounts of nature, seem to us so precious. He endured to the full the horror of one who reaches a stage where there is no longer the possession of any self he would have projected into any future whatsoever!

James Thomson's greatest poems are signposts on that *Via Crucis* which the most sensitive, the most gifted, have all too often traveled. And we watch

again and again the gifted, the beautiful, perish miserably, for want of a little comfort, a few necessaries, back against the wall, feet in the gutter. It is not civilization that permits such tragedies, it is brute society vastly more concerned about its material possessions than about human suffering or the sources of its intellectual and spiritual treasure. This genius by which men warm themselves and help soul and body, do they owe it nothing? Would they thus treat the host of any other inn? If they have taken, shall they not give?—at least pay something for what they take? Even as I ask this question, I see him in the squalor of those London streets which were the only couch he knew in the last days of his life without a sixpence to his name, without shoes for his feet, ragged, starving. Thomson had no vices—not even any faults, he was always gentle, always spirited; even up almost to the last moment, with dogged persistence trying to find some footing somewhere, always generous, always sensitive, but he was a dipsomaniac and at the mercy of disease. It is a poorly organized society that will take no steps to safeguard its best from such disaster. Who is that Shylock who would knowingly and willingly purchase a great poem at the price of such disaster to a fellow human being?

IV

STIGMATA

IV

STIGMATA

"Far flickers the light of the swallows,
  Far flutters the waft of the grass,
Spun dense over desolate hollows
  More pale than the clouds as they pass:
Thick woven as the weft of a witch is
  Round the heart of a thrall that has sinned
Where youth and the wrecks of its riches
  Are waifs on the wind.

By the North Sea

POETRY does not just happen. It is as much the result of a cause as the flame of firelight. Poetry represents liberated energy. We have our poets numbered and ticketed. But there are moods in which it is felt that no more is known about them than what is found on their name tags. Certainly according to the criteria of modern science, literary criticism is yet unborn. We see an exhibition which we can safely announce to be genius. But what, on the basis of scientific investigation and facts, this really is, its cause, its laws, its chartings,—of all that we are almost as ignorant as Columbus was of the coast of America before he discovered it. Paranoia, genius; a

Byron, a *Manfred*:—we do not stop to question aim and motive but go no further than childish staring as the electric light of genius flashes on and off.

We have traveled grudgingly forward in literary criticism taught timidly by our masters, our teachers, the past, one crutch, two crutches, a limping mind. We see dimly that the tubercle bacillus did play its part in Robert Louis Stevenson's work. He himself acknowledges in the *Vailima Letters* the immense deprivation which his recovered health meant in loss of stimulus to his artistic faculties. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus,* indigestion,—some interplay of morbid forces which is unintelligible to us and which we dare not question. De Quincey, opium, *The Confessions;* Coleridge, opium, poetry,—yes, ominous cloud on the horizon of classic and moribund criticism. . . . It has been said that a man is what his microbes make him, and in nothing, it would seem, is this more true than with the man of genius.

How far and completely the modern world has bent the knee to its men of genius can be seen in the fact that it has acknowledged through leadership that the degree of genius may be higher in the insane than in the sane. Nietzsche with his stigmata of insanity and his recurrent asylum life has done more than any other man to plunge Europe into the hell of woe from which it now struggles to emerge. Humanity has given him

that power. Strindberg with his maniac depressive work captivates our attention to-day. And criticism, disregarding his asylum periods and the fact that some of his work he himself acknowledges to have been done during periods of insanity,—and criticism pours forth upon him a flood of praise. This looks like a sum done in favor of insanity. On the contrary it is a discount or subtraction from genius and its values. It is possible to conclude that as a motivating power genius has done quite as much harm as good. In the past superstition has assigned to insanity the Evil Spirit as motor force, to genius Divinity. But it might be questioned whether there is any such line of demarcation. We must subtract from both dicta of this superstition. The inspiration of genius is by no manner of means always inspired, nor is that of insanity evil. Is there not a kind of "inner wisdom" to madness, some sense of the binding unity of all things; and some attitude of the mind—maybe the dream beyond all bounds—from which comes illumination? Here in the chemistry of minds is some mystery,—some added energy which liberates vision. Indeed, there is the type of writer or artist who is inspired only when he is mad. It would often seem as if the world's history were made by the asylum and the hospital, by neuropaths and epileptics and consumptives, and that there was in this—as in the lives of Coleridge,

Byron, Shelley, Keats, Mrs. Browning, Rossetti, James Thomson, Francis Thompson, Swinburne,—an argument in favor of asylum and hospital. On the contrary this fact proves nothing but that Nature has her plans and that one of them is that a species after reaching perfection shall fall and perish,—true of individuals, true of nations. That is Nature's plan everywhere evident wherever we turn. Nature is the great economist: she will use to the uttermost whatever a man possesses. Weak in character, Nature will lend flame to temperament and make that serve mankind. About to perish, Nature sees that the mind burns the more brightly. She exacts the last ounce of energy from whatever lives or lives in dying,—yes, from the very stuff of death itself. It is this kind of literary discovery which is excuse for thinking that the place of the literary critic might well be taken for a while at least, by the scientific investigator. The leading light of the new criticism could to advantage and for a short distance lie along the path of physiological research.

Genius goes back to physical fact. It is a question of sensitization of protoplasm. The foundations of the greatest Cathedral of beauty ever erected by the mind of genius rest squarely upon the flesh of a man's body. It is in the morbid stimulation of protoplasm that toxins, drugs, alcohol enter in. Disorder reigns

supreme, chaos, noise, nervousness, near-madness, through the stimulus of some toxins manufactured in a man's own system. Tea, coffee, drugs, alcohol, seem temporarily at least to put the mental furniture in order, to bring harmony where there has been disorder. Opium is not genius. Alcohol is not genius. Madness is not genius. But all would sometimes appear to have the power to act as umpire for genius where its right to go forward is in question. And it would seem that the purchasing power of dreams was even greater in insanity than with either alcohol or opium.

At more than one point in the study of a man's poetry, science lays upon the critic the obligation to pause and say: Is this a microbe affair or a human affair? There is always something sinister about genius, for by its very physical constitution it looks through the eyes of a death's-head—looks, in short, towards the end. Here is perfection at the expense of life. Expression in literature a symptom of decadence? Yes, but what sort of shadow does all this cast on what we call spiritual life and its progress? What is this expense of the soul?

Coleridge sought asylum in opium and found it. But it must never be forgotten that he did so seek asylum or what that asylum meant. It becomes more and more clear to me that opium meant some sort of in-

tellectual freedom from out of the midst of the microbic warfare within him,—something which looked like beneficent toxins for the evil of bacteria which fed on him. And equally it meant complete moral ruin.

The unfortunate fact about most readers of Swinburne is that they either accept his poetry without question, and immediately are ranked among the so-called and now fashionable Swinburnians, or they reject his poetry altogether. I think both attitudes are bad: submission, because unintelligent as applied to poetry or anything else, is rarely ever a good quality; condemnation, because it is unscientific in its attitude, is almost equally vicious in its results. We say of a certain person, "He is mad," simply because we do not understand him. "Mad" becomes a cheap escape from thinking. We condemn because we are unthinking: it is the easiest and first thing to do. Truly, Swinburne's conception of life is not that of Thomas à Kempis! His instinctive tendency towards rancors and hatreds, towards atheism, towards amorousness, in his poetry creates an atmosphere in which some of us do not feel at home. It is true that Swinburne abuses God in order that he may exalt love. What more is there to say? In *Atalanta,* we have these lines:

> "All we are against Thee,
> Against Thee, O God most high."

And in his hands, God becomes the "supreme evil God."

Here is poetry which is valued or disliked in proportion as we are able with the rhythm of its first line to swing ourselves into that particular mood which makes love of Swinburne's poetry possible. The peculiarity of it is that it is not thought expressing itself musically, but music in which thought is blurred or vanished altogether. Such poetry can never fulfill the function completely, or be classed as great. But why go so far as to deny it the right to exist? It is true that with Swinburne, language becomes not even a "beautiful disease." It is verbosity verbose. And, I believe, of pathological significance.

Form is the exfoliation of an idea or the structural expression of sheer physical energy of one sort or another. With Swinburne form in intricate verse, in peculiar use of words but not in development of ideas, is the exfoliation with which we have to deal. With Swinburne, words and the metrical forms are of supreme importance. Where there is no outlet for his particular lyricism and he deals with an idea solely we have rubbish. Walt Whitman is said to have said that Swinburne's poetry made him think of a table set with beautiful china, but with nothing on it to eat. Many of Swinburne's stanzas are sonorously beautiful, but try to separate the meaning from them and

they mean nothing. We see words, feel them, hear them, are swept along by them, are repelled by them, mount on them and even go to sleep on them. Swinburne is the greatest of word thieves,—and there have been many! Could it not be proved that in his poetry there is more than the average history and presence of imitation? Often merely that he can compose a certain poem is all the original force it contains, for he will have borrowed both words and idea from Elizabethan sources, or from Rossetti or Browning. Here in *Rosamond* is Swinburne writing beautifully under the influence of Browning:

> "Who calls it Spring?
> Simply the winter plays at red and green.
> Clean white no colour for me, did they say?
> I never loved white roses much; but see
> How the wind drenches the low lime-branches
> With shaken silver in the rainiest leaves.
> Mere winter, winter."

In no poetry are words used with more consummate mastery as words than in his, provided we can conceive words denatured of meaning. Edward Thomas has written, "The words are everything." One should add that the meaning of whatever Swinburne has to say, where meaning exists, is subdued to the sound. Rhythm, cadence, music, color of words, all these qualities make long lines of his best poetry indivisible.

Even if the line is without meaning, it cannot be divided. It has become in the hands of Swinburne, with or without meaning, a harmonious whole.

We may look upon the work of Swinburne as Browning did, calling it a "fuzz of words." Or we may do what I am trying to do; that is, separate the color and music of a word from its meaning. Admit that such a process is arbitrary, is unsatisfactory, yet it helps towards the discovery of that which, whether we like the poetry or not, makes Swinburne's poetry of its kind supreme. The most brilliant of Swinburne's critics, Edward Thomas, who was killed in the battle of Arras, wrote that never do the words obstruct the rhythm,—indeed in Swinburne, it is possible to regard the word as stripped of special significance, and become like the rime and rhythm a framework part of the intellectual whole,—just as in the creative world we may look upon temperament as stripped of the necessity for character. Even as in creative work temperament and not character is paramount, so in the peculiarity of the typical line of Swinburne's poetry rhythm is paramount,—the word is the rhythm. The web of Swinburne's words does not call for pure intelligence. It is possible, I suppose, to cultivate expression in speech that makes thought inevident,—in other words, music that is inarticulate. Swinburne uses words remotely. It is often difficult to bring them

back to the simplicities of their meaning,—to make them concrete with significance. His "musical jargon" is a speech by itself. It is peculiarly true of Swinburne that he loved words as much or more than he loved nature, and assuredly more than he loved man. It is out of this fact that his poetry arises. It is not exactly speech and it is never wholly human—only snatches of human speech here and there. One is tempted to look upon this as mere "tumult of words." At least scientifically speaking this temptation should be resisted. In this rebellious, inexplicable speech of Swinburne, there is much of the rebel, there is anarchy. Again, as far as health and holiness in Swinburne are concerned, the question is what the significance of this anarchy of language portends. What is this poetry which has meaning for the ear alone and no message for the mind? Except for the obsessed Puritan it is not content which challenges our attention: it is form expressing itself through sound. If the supreme artist is the supreme intelligence, what is this poetical material of Swinburne's which, unlike great poetry always formidable with thought, is so empty of meaning? Where significance is of prime importance, as it must always be in human communication, of which poetry is one means, here is a fact which challenges. Mrs. Meynell writes in *Hearts of Controversy,* "The words have swallowed, not the thought only, but the

imagery." But how can words swallow what does not exist—this beautiful nothingness of Swinburne's meaning?

Edward Thomas has wittily said that Swinburne kept "a harem of words, to which he was constantly and absolutely faithful." It is a strange fact, despite Swinburne's extraordinary vocabulary, that there is nothing magical in his versatility in their use. Some of the master words in his poetry are: "fire," "light," "bright," "shine," "desire," "high," "sky." It can be said that Swinburne practically never writes one of these words without repeating it. Here is a curious question whether or not there was something in the "i" sound which satisfied his nature. Something shrill about the "i" sound there is, something ecstatic, and Swinburne was both shrill and ecstatic.

Here from one of the choruses of *Atalanta* is an illustration of his use of the "i" sound:

> "Thy wings make light in the air as the wings of a dove.
> Thy feet are as wings that divide the stream of the sea;
> Earth is thy covering to hide thee, the garment of thee.
> Thou art swift and subtle and blind as a flame of fire;
> Before thee the laughter, behind thee the tears of desire."

Songs before Sunrise, too, is full of these words of light. In Francis Thompson's poems and essays is the same emphasis on light. It is known that the optic

nerve is as swift as any nerve in the body to make record of the physical condition as a whole. But the cup of vision, of dream, was always at the lips of Francis Thompson,—not the "dreams" he purchased at the expense of his poor body but that informing passionate awareness of God which confirms the faith and the vision of his poetry even where it breaks under the disaster of his life. Of such vision, of such faith there is precisely nothing at all in Swinburne's poetry. In the flight of Francis Thompson's words one feels that near-madness may have played its occasional part in the chemistry of his thought; liberating his vision, establishing his faith. But with Swinburne there comes no such conviction, for he had neither faith nor vision.

Is there some multiplying of even memory in this thieving of words and use of other men's emotions which is as pathological as forgetting is? It is probably true that memory as a faculty is not predominant in the great creative artist who is concerned not so much about making carbon copies of other men's thoughts and other men's emotions as with the creation of that which for the moment he believes to belong to him and to him alone. The ability to forget is one of the blessings of the creative mind, for in that *oubliance* is fallow field for rebirth, reshaping. Swinburne's memory was not as other men's, but most extraordi-

nary. What is the meaning of all this exaggeration, exaggeration in appearance, in manner, in the manner and content of his poetry? The question cannot be dismissed. The answer must at least be attempted. If, with the dictionary, we mean by insanity incapacity to distinguish between right and wrong with regard to any matter under action,—that is, that which does away with individual responsibility, we find ourselves confronted by many puzzling questions, big and small, in matters of personal conduct. I can think of Swinburne only as belonging to those personalities we must call sane. Erratic tendencies, however grouped, do not of necessity constitute insanity. Was he merely absorptive, shallow, a brilliant prestidigitator with rhythm and a juggler with other men's thoughts?

Epileptic in the strict sense of that word Swinburne certainly was not, for there was never any progressive degeneration of the mind. Quite the contrary: Swinburne, the sturdy little old man, was much sounder, if less interesting, than Swinburne in his "April youth." Edmund Gosse is misleading. He should be clever enough to know that some scientist would find him out. In the Swinburne attacks described by Gosse there is neither the suffused face nor the frothing lips of the true epileptic. This was hysteria, and to my mind, largely due to so-called dissipation: in this case alcohol and sex indulgence. For example, in 1867, he lived

at intellectual high pitch and then found escape for his intellectual fervors in dissipation: "The Admiral wrote to Lord Houghton (July 28), 'Algernon has fallen willingly into regular hours and habits, as he always does when he is with us. He is tractable and willing to do everything that is required of him. It cannot be expected, and therefore is not insisted upon, that his mental faculties should lie fallow, but we do all we can to keep them tranquil. We feel him to be safe while he is here.' A fortnight later still (August 13), Swinburne writes in fully regained high spirits: 'My last attack was, they say, of a really dangerous kind, and I am prescribed a *torpor* of mind and body for months.' The remainder of this letter shows no trace of mental 'torpor.' 'My mother is very urgent with me not to move or make the least change in my habits.'" Gosse saw Swinburne in one of these attacks:—"It was on the 9th of July, 1868, rather late in the afternoon. Swinburne had fallen in a fit while working in the reading-room of the British Museum, and had cut his forehead superficially against the iron staple of the desk. I was walking along a corridor when I was passed by a couple of silent attendants rapidly carrying along in a chair what seemed to be a dead man. I recognized him instantly from his photographs which now filled the shop windows. His hanging hands, closed eyelids, corpse-white face, and

red hair dabbled in blood presented an appearance of the utmost horror, but I learned a few days later that his recovery was rapid and complete."

His racketings brought him various undesirable public attentions, such as dismissal from the Arts Club. In the records of Whistler's life will be found an account of the "tanning" he administered on Swinburne's behalf. "You ought to be proud," he told the Committee, "that there is in London a Club where the greatest poet of your time *can* get drunk if he wants to, otherwise he might lie in the gutter." Here is a left-over glorification of intoxication from the times of Dickens and earlier. Edmund Gosse must have been saying to himself, "Drunkenness to-day? No, that will never, never do! Let it be epilepsy!" And it was epilepsy. Mr. Gosse is un-Victorian in this discount of alcohol, yet he is not modern enough to see that in any study of Swinburne as his literary biographer can be no question of blame,—only of truthful understanding. Any one who suffers from dipsomania, as Swinburne did, is ill. Invective and condemnation would seem silly in discussing tuberculosis. They are equally futile in discussing such a somatic illness as Swinburne's with all its toxic complexities. Quiller-Couch speaks of literary and parliamentary "decency" in the withholding of one word of five letters. One can but reply that science and truth

know neither decency nor indecency. They know only life. And of great literature whether it be poem, novel, play, biography, must the same be said. Ezra Pound, who, it might be said, both understands and possesses words, wastes too many calories of sizzling epithets on Mr. Gosse. One arrives nowhere calling Gosse "silly and pompous" or the "anemic Gosse" or by reference to "papier-mâché eras." Thomas Hake and Arthur Compton-Rickett are far more just in asking the reader's attention for the failure of Mr. Gosse's treatment of the Watts-Dunton part of Swinburne's life, but also for the brilliancy of his portraiture of the earlier Swinburne. And it is they who among the friends of Watts-Dunton understand how full of disinterested self-sacrifice was his friendship for Swinburne and how much Watts-Dunton did to make the poet well again.

Swinburne's family connection may have had something to do with what Edmund Gosse mistakenly calls his epileptic tendencies. There was a great deal of intermarriage in the Ashburnham and Swinburne families. The relationships were complex. Is the explanation of epilepsy specious or not? The blatant irresponsibility of families in making biographies certainly is not specious. There is a great deal of humbuggery in the average literary family. Compare these biographies which suppress all undesirable detail

or give false rather than valid causes for certain manifestations with the work of a man of science. The slide that goes under the microscope reveals everything. So should a life that is written, or it should not be written at all. And to this group belongs Swinburne's life.

One might show, if one cared to accept Edmund Gosse's explanation of epilepsy, that such poetry as this is the epileptic at work. But so far as I can see, Swinburne was never epileptic. The word was used as a respectable whitewash for certain manifestations of his temperament, which Philistia, too ignorant and too prudish to explain scientifically, wished to gloss over. It should be said that there is no known member of the Swinburne or Ashburnham families who in the least resembled him intellectually. Anything idiosyncratic which he may have inherited from these families was purely physical. . . . As far as his mental and moral characteristics are concerned, we may satisfy ourselves, if we wish, by saying that this is "difference," not degeneracy. But with such explanation, it is difficult to be content. Here is the old battleground of the connection between genius and physical peculiarities.

There is peril in calling everything above, or depressed below the general level of experience, unbalanced. The line of life is not a straight line. Rather

it is a curved line, a broken line, an infinite variation of any number of different kinds of lines. Why may this not be the case with experience? There is a certain danger in touching our subject with the word "pathology." To this danger attention should be directed. We have nothing here to do with the disturbed proprieties. Those "proprieties" were mid-Victorian, and that era is dead,—all except its aftermath of drunkenness and sexual viciousness. No "proper" age *ever* left behind it so much that is fundamentally improper or morally vicious as the Victorian.

Belonging to the *morbidezza* of Swinburne's poetry is his conception of death. This reveals his love of life. Very often his men and women, indignant with the shortness of life, as well as strident with other indignations, are not much more than licentious beasts. They rail at weariness in order that they may show somewhat of the fury of living that has led to it; they are pale because they have misspent their blood; they are sorry or sorrowful because they have drunk what they call joy to the lees; and with them, "monks and nuns in a shrine" of lust, sin becomes prayer. That Swinburne should take "sin," shake it loose from its Puritanic moorings and couple it for exaltation with Love and Time matters very little. But the failure of his vision in so doing matters much. His beloved

Blake can tell us more of sin, couple it with God's mercy and cause us to grow thereby. Blake will not call good and evil innocence and experience. In sin he sees a cloud, but it is a sheltering cloud and not *evil*. He believed so in the goodness of God that he was convinced of sin—that we might grow towards the light and be able to bear its exceeding brightness and not have the tissues of mind, soul and body torn to pieces, as by an X-ray, by that light which transcends our understanding. In this reverent attitude towards sin Blake's art is here as everywhere great, for it brings both revelation and healing. Where Swinburne attempts to find sensual joy by means of sin, Blake finds God. . . . Nevertheless it is not to be forgotten, even here, that Swinburne himself quoted this one from among the greatest passages of Blake: "The worship of God is, honoring His gifts in other men according to his genius and loving the greatest men best: those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God." . . . Yes, these Swinburnian, flame-colored "young men" of some seventy-two years, weary one! Such youth is not of the nature of life. Even old age in his hands becomes sensual intoxication. It is possible to be a drunkard in more ways than one. One may be drunk with desire, with pain, with pleasure, with hate, with sor-

row, with death, and with satiety. And drunk with all these things, Swinburne was, and each and all of them he coupled with sin.

England was much troubled by the Swinburne who prayed to Dolores to "forgive us our virtues." And the shock which England felt cannot be explained wholly on the grounds of Philistinism and prudishness. He really is rather nasty sometimes. In some senses, he must have been indecent from his youth up, if tainted thoughts can make a man indecent. It is not only lewdness of imagery which inevitably troubles one, it is that profound lewdness which is a thing of the spirit. There is no denying that many of the pages of Swinburne's poetry record the figurative work of the gross sensualist. Even in *Atalanta,* where the choruses are the very wind-words of beauty, we find figures which repel by their deliberately sensual use. It is the moral monkey who is chattering when he says, as did Swinburne at a supper party, that if he could indulge his whim, he would build a castle with seven towers, in each one of which one of the seven deadly sins would be enacted each day. Perhaps, however, he intended this as sermonic in value,—there could be no greater plea for a pure life than such a cluster of seven towers!

In Swinburne there is always something of the rebel. It would be strange if this were not true morally, as

well as in other ways. It heightened his energy to deny or oppose ignorant or easy condemnation. Maybe it was partly this fact which propelled him to the other extreme of ethical atheism. It is not likely that he ever considered the defeat, the futility of the attempt to find joy by means of evil. Silly is much of this verse of Swinburne: it has in it all the futility of intended evil and all the vacancies of the meaningless. There is always something amusing about intended evil: it is the antic of the moral child at play and still believing that escape from law is possible. Yet it must not be forgotten that his, despite many dissipations, was a singularly clear mind. In writing of Baudelaire, Swinburne said: "It is not his or any artist's business to warn against evil; but certainly he does not exhort to it, knowing well enough that the one fault is as great as the other."

In a sense, from the highest point of view, Swinburne's work is poetry for intellectual invalids. His borrowings are large. His dilutions immense. Here is accomplished fluidity,—and some people confuse mental and emotional liquefaction with poetry. Personally, it seems to me, this millstream idea of poetry ceases to bring with it even the sweet sound of falling water, or the peace of droning bees. And here are some of the finger posts to those fatal vacancies of thought which winds of words cannot make us forget.

Alice Meynell says she learned at illustrious knees that, "You may not dissociate the matter and manner of any of the greatest poets; the two are so fused by integrity of fire, whether in tragedy or epic or in the simplest song, that the sundering is the vainest task of criticism." The material of Swinburne's poetry is negatively, by its vacancies, imitations, thefts, as much proof of Swinburne's diseased faculties, as positively, is the manner by its feeble and borrowed excitements. Here are inner weakness and outer deformity. Maybe it is society which is the Comprachico that has worked upon this mind to cripple it; maybe it is not.

It should not be forgotten that Swinburne was never really without admiration for those who were healthy of mind and reasonable in their contact. Perhaps the kindest way to look upon his monkey morality is as aberration. He admired and read incessantly Charles Dickens. He worshiped Blake. His greatest tastes were moral. If we judge Swinburne by that which he admires, we must be kinder to him in our thought, than in judging him by that which he did and said himself. He praises Victor Hugo, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, Mrs. Browning, and often with a sort of childlike idolatry. His intellectual amusements must always remain caviare to that most un-Rabelaisian of all publics, the English people. Poetic pleasures that indulge themselves in abuse of the Deity are not

for the Anglo-Saxon. Yet, it is to be remembered that Swinburne worshiped in other men many of the greatest gifts of God. It is a curious fact that a man who could be so cruel to the religious instincts and feelings of his public, would have hesitated personally to be unkind to the least of God's creatures. For those who know Swinburne's life well, it would be difficult to forget his delicate refusals to discuss or question things which might distress old people, his love for and understanding of old people, his adoration for little children and birds, his reverence for and obedience to his beautiful old mother, the Lady Jane Swinburne, his tender memory for those loved and gone, his kindness to the maimed, the needy, the handicapped, his modesty about his own work, his sense of humor, his fearless republicanism, his rapturous worship of the sea, his physical courage. His love for his mother and his love for children are the most satisfying personal expressions of his life. I do not see why any manifestation of Swinburne's mentality should trouble us ethically or religiously any more than we might be troubled by a little man who, neither himself nor at his best, reeled against a great mountain and labored under the delusion that he had knocked the mountain over. In Swinburne is only one more exercise for our intelligent sympathy and our understanding in a world wherein many minds and hearts and bodies not only

break but also suffer from all sorts of minor contusions and injuries.

When all is said and done one conception of Swinburne's work is lost, but another is gained. We see him not as responsible but as irresponsible,—dipsomania his master. And we study anew the symbols for the equation of health plus virtue in the making of character and in the conduct of life. It happens that at this particular moment we are in need of those who will do yeoman's service in behalf of a possible scientific criticism. Poison or insincerity, which? is the cry which must come from many of us as groping for pure air we turn away from the frequent nastiness of poem and story and play to-day. Is this hypnotic stuff produced by clever caterers? Or by the victims of a microbic circumstance? At least and either way there rises up before us, like a new day, the vision of a new and greater health of mind and body in which it is essential that we understand what is destruction in genius in order that we may build up and safeguard construction.

V

"HEALTH AND HOLINESS"

V

"HEALTH AND HOLINESS"

"Fear wist not to evade, as Love wist to pursue."
The Hound of Heaven.

FLEETER of spirit is Francis Thompson. James Thomson's and Francis Thompson's was a sad cousinship of sad habit. Beyond that and their genius as poets they were not related. Of pessimism there is precisely nothing in Francis Thompson's poems; of Catholic devoutness, Catholic sorrow, there is everything, every candle and every solace and every shrine. Much of Francis Thompson's poetry is not poetry. It is the versified doctrine and dogma of the Holy Roman Catholic Church,—that most beautiful, historically speaking, of all our Christian churches. This is all very well for those who are intimate with the special doctrines of the Roman Church but confusing for those who are not initiated. After reading Thompson critics look up and say "Crashaw!" One word which is supposed to make clear his special religious adherence and his peculiar traits as a poet. But they might as well say "Shelley" or "Poe" or "Rossetti," for Francis Thompson's indebtedness to

them is as great or greater. There are lines of matchless beauty in Thompson's poems. No volume of Keats contains more such beauty.

"Still, Season, still thou hast thy triumphs there!" from *Corymbus for Autumn* is as unquestionably reminiscent of Keats as are the following lines from *Songs of the Hours* reminiscent of Shelley:

> "We soar to our zeniths
> And are panglessly overblown."

Cadences too, even hall-marked words of Poe, are found,—for example, in *The Sere of the Leaf*. And there are many lines very like Rossetti. A single illustration from *Dream Tryst* must be sufficient:

> "Who with the past meet girt about:
> Where our last kiss still warms the air,
> Nor can her eyes go out."

What matters on Thompson's part is not that he seems to follow Crashaw, but that he rejects that universal speech which might have made him great and would have made him understood by all. That common language was well within his grasp can be seen in such poems as *To Olivia, Little Jesus, Arab Love Song, At Lord's,* and *Love and the Child*. . . . But there is a certain intimate, self-congratulatory atmosphere about many of Francis Thompson's poems, as if

they were written by one who, whatever his self-acknowledged failure is, nevertheless, of an elect group. It is possible that "holiness," like poetry, has its pitfalls of clique and complacency, of inner sanctity and outer confusion. In *Her Portrait* is the extreme of introspective poetry, feverish hair-splitting of every aspect of the soul, of all bodiless emotion,—if such a thing there be! And in their discounting of the body Francis Thompson and his friends make a school of fanatical medievalists who are touched by the morbid. Their poetry is a manner of speech and it is not a familiar manner,—nor for that matter a natural one. Much of Francis Thompson's poetry is so unnatural that the time could scarcely come—however much it was read and re-read—when its speech could seem universal. Its tendency is always towards the artificial and when the artificial has set in in an art, death is beginning. Oratorical questions are as much "property" in a particular type of poetic artifice as are some aspects of the pastoral. After the reader has been asked a certain number of oratorical questions he really does not care whether he ever has an answer or not. His one thought is to escape into silence where the properties of the classical and the stiltedness of the ornate can find him no more. Much of Thompson's work is the extreme of ornate poetry. I can but believe that as time goes on and the immediate sense of con-

tact of his life with that of the Meynells is lost, his verse will seem more rather than less curious, more removed from ordinary speech and ordinary emotion and less intelligible. It is too difficult and too remote. And the greatest poets, with a far larger vocabulary, are never too difficult or too remote. His poems are lustrous mosaics inlaid with strange words, vague pictures of unusual experience. Yet a mosaic that is not clear is a contradiction. His are orchid words, precious, growing in dark remote places, found with difficulty in uncharted regions of the mind. No amount of study would make such words as these, taken from various poems seem familiar; agaric, corymbus, immeditably, testating, spilth, gracile, crocean, cicatrices, frush, enrondure, cymar, thurifer, hierophant, chiton, oubliette, plenilune, vaward, fuliginous, altern. For however loving a reader of Francis Thompson—and I count myself among that number—they must remain unusual.

Because of opium there is no departure from "holiness" or "goodness" in Francis Thompson's drug-addicted, shattered life. Where the illness was tuberculosis one would not necessarily expect to find evil. Nor in the case of opium addiction, except in the popular thought, do we always find "fiends" or those who do no wrong. Concerning the habit of laudanum drinking, begun when Francis Thompson was a student

at medical school, but little of the chronology will prove of use. An illness when he was a lad and a gift of De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* from his mother—the last gift before her death—these, apparently, were the immediate causes of his addiction to opium. The larger etiology will probably never be known. The history to the end we do not need to know. The counting of all the petals of that broken poppy,—how would such arithmetic avail us?

The most wholesome side of Francis Thompson is found in that remarkable essay, *Health and Holiness.* But the emphasis both here, and in the *Life of Thompson* by Everard Meynell, reveals the man who has struggled with disease and vice,—life becomes an "ascetic exercise." Lovingly Francis Thompson lingers about the dying confession of St. Francis of Assisi, as his "slave-driven body" was perishing; "I have been too hard on Brother Ass." In Francis Thompson's mind there must have been a larger suspicion than of mere hardship to Brother Ass, the human body—perhaps of harshness to frailties, sometimes, if not always, beyond any human control.

There is a peculiar color and a peculiar motion—if it may be so expressed, for it is absence of color rather than its presence and interrupted or inhibited motion—in the style of narcotized English. It is the white, quintessential light of what is called eloquence—the

very wing of speech released from all ordinary control. It is the rapture of flight one may experience in delirium—that world where there is no fall of foot, no staying of the hand,—only the immense circling of liberation. And of this rapture of flight there is much in Thompson's prose and poetry. But it is impossible to dissect fully what reveals itself after all more by absence or inhibition rather than by presence. *Mœstitiæ Encomium* by Thompson presents an interesting contrast to the few simple, tender stanzas of Keat's ode from *Endymion*. . . . Many pathological states write themselves down in this essay.

In *Finis Coronat Opus* sound reveals the author's condition. It is plain that heart and auditory nerves are badly disturbed: "How long had I seen them? I saw them still. There was a buzzing in my brain as if a bell had ceased to toll. How long had it ceased to toll? I know not. Has any bell been tolling? I know not. All my senses are resolved into one sense, and that is frozen to those eyes. Silence now, at least; abysmal silence; except the sound (or is the sound in me?) the sound of dripping blood; except that the flame upon the altar sputters, and hisses, and bickers, as if it licked its jaws. Yes, there is another sound—hush, hark!—It is the throbbing of my heart. Not—no, nevermore the throbbing of *her* heart! The loud pulse dies slowly away, as I hope my life is dying; and

again I hear the licking of the flame." Take this one essay alone and leave out consideration of sound altogether. Study it simply from the point of view of the effect of light on the nerves of the narcotized eye. The revelation is sufficient. Indeed, much of such material as is found in *Finis Coronat Opus* is the maundering of narcomania. There is no clear vision in it.

The painful pulse of his disease is written broadcast in the poetry, too. Here are "the manifold doors of heavy-winged years." The margins of that cruel sea on whose shores this poet was are all too evident in his poetry to one who understands the geography of that barren land and the tides of those wild seas. In *Sister Songs* is all the phantasmagoria of *Kubla Khan,* and the conviction of innocence lost that Coleridge had. Of *Kubla Khan* Mrs. Meynell wrote me: "I wish *Kubla Khan* had never been written at such a price. If I could write a masterpiece at such a price, God forbid it me." The hardened or analytical sympathies even of the scientist refuse, where struggle was so valiant, and accident or inheritance so all-powerful, the drawing of general conclusions. What would they avail? What use even to dwell tenderly, as Alice Meynell does, in her article in the *Dublin Review,* on the "evasion of the daily dues of man to man?" What avail to write and speak of the bonds broken, the demands unmet, the ideals shattered?

Thompson was always good in the usual sense of that word which, since we are human, admits the possibility of occasional mistake, even sin. He shared with Wordsworth at his sternest an acknowledgment of the higher law. His *Hound of Heaven* tells us even more greatly than Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty* that there is one bondage and one law in which alone men can find freedom: *the highest life of which they are capable.* He was much adrift economically speaking until his beautiful friends, the Meynells, found him and placed his lodging and food in their own home or in some equally safe place. From the point of view of his soul or mind—whatever the spirit is—he was never adrift. In Thompson it was no more possible to destroy the holiness of the spirit than in James Thomson it was possible to annihilate altogether the firm texture of his character. The evidence which is found in the work of Francis Thompson of his drug habits and, it might be added, of his tuberculosis, for they were an inseparable illness in this case, is constant reference, quite frank but exaggerated, to his own mistaken and broken life, direct naming here and there of opium and hasheesh; unmeaning eloquence, unevenness of work, search for the extraordinary, whether in emotion or word and occasional narcotic passages like this one from the Eighth Canto of the *Sister Songs:*

"Once—in the nightmare time which still doth haunt
My dreams, a grim, unbidden visitant—
Forlorn, and faint, and stark,
I had endured through watches of the dark
The abashless inquisition of each star,
Yea, was the outcast mark
Of all these heavenly passers' scrutiny;
Stood bound and helpless

"For Time to shoot his barbed minutes at me;
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour
In night's slow-wheeled car;
Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length
From under those dread wheels; and, bled of strength,
I waited the inevitable last."

But above all else in Francis Thompson's work I find an unfulfilled greatness.

. . . . . .

No doubt one reason why so many people are addicted to conclusions is that they are really ready-to-hand, shaped by some one else, or the undisputed collective experience of society. They require no intellectual effort. But thinking is a process which has not necessarily anything to do with conclusions, for once the conclusion is reached, the process of thought is finished. The intelligent human being grows weary of cheap hocus-pocus talk about "virtue," as if it were an ointment to be externally applied and rubbed in for the benefit of stiff-jointed, ill souls. Even if there is

no such cure-all salve of virtue, unquestionably intelligence itself is a virtue. Therefore the value of education which gives the human being greater opportunity to learn how to discriminate among facts, the penalties of which are so inexorable. . . . In the slow photography of a sick human soul inevitably certain things record themselves which are unexpected. The possible value of such studies as these lies not in their conclusions—if it were possible to make any—but in open-minded consideration of what for the present admits of no conclusion. Shelley in his definition of poetry from the *Defence of Poetry* wrote:—"A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind; awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the color of a flower which fades and changes as it develops, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure." In these artists in which degenerated or diseased processes were going forward, it would seem to be the thought content, rather than the form or shape of poems, that is injured. Indeed even while the thought dies, the form—the poem's shape of beauty—seems to gain some strange illumination,—some ghostly aura from quick-burning nerves. . . .

Forms of insanity have always stood in some relation of value to society: the epileptic leader, prophecy and revelation. Disease? We battle against it and thereby we grow. Is it, too, productive of energy? In some all too human moods one is tempted to say that disease can do nothing but destroy, make hideous, bring death. But as one looks at nature this is seen not to be so. Take the pine cone gall so common to the willow-tree. There it hangs, mysteriously beautiful in its gray-green fruit, one soft exfoliating leaf overlapping the other till all are formed into the shape of the perfected pine cone, but in color like the dew-silvered leaf of the clover. Yet the pine cone gall is the result of disease due to the sting of an insect and the derangement of the plant cells. . . . A treacherous question arrests one: After all are certain manifestations of civilization culture or injury?

It used to be thought wicked to question the flatness of the earth. Men mobbed Columbus with, "The earth is flat! The earth is square!" Columbus was reckless enough to face the problem. Even the most pessimistic about our Western civilization must admit that commerce has benefited by Columbus's daring. We Americans at least should not question his beneficent audacity. In the future some Columbus in literature will come along and tell us that every prob-

lem in literary genius goes back not to the man alone but to the microbe and the man.

We are indeed what our microbes make us, and of genius is this doubly true. We may trace every good and every evil of genius back to that microbe. Do this and we shall not pity less but pity more. All that the bacteriologist knows but makes his pity infinite. And his pity will include the possible influence of even carious teeth and their relation to insanity. He is the scientist, patient of research, and knows. But the literary critic, glib of word, has forgotten that human body from whose interrelations springs not only the greatest cathedral but every book in every library of all the world and every human institution ever erected. If we take the point of view of the bacteriologist, we shall not appreciate less but appreciate more. Oh, but we are afraid of having everything beautiful we have ever loved destroyed! Why should scientific criticism destroy beauty? Does the knowledge of astronomy, biology, botany, geology, destroy our love for the beauty of Nature? The whole medieval superstitious business of fearing knowledge is nonsense. Every truth is but further conviction that God is,—perhaps not in the way men want God to be. But that men should standardize God according to our human limitations is the great human impertinence!

The scientist is not to be denied in this day and gen-

eration. Was it not Tennyson who said that an artist should be lord of all five senses? No artist doing work under the influence of narcotics is lord of his senses—he has given his sovereignty over to opium.

"Why," said a young woman, "does Swinburne use these words this way?"

She pointed to a group of words whose toes were doing all the steps known to accomplish Bacchantes.

"Alcohol," was the reply.

"Why," she might have asked, "did De Quincey write so unequally often, so strangely sometimes?"

"Laudanum, the alcoholic tincture of opium."

"How did Coleridge manage to create *Kubla Khan?*"

That is a question not yet decided. Probably a long history of unintentional drug-taking lay behind this poem. The "paper books," however, in which Coleridge recorded his confessions are lost.

"Why did Poe write *Ulalume?*"

"Opium and alcohol."

"Why the *Pit and the Pendulum,* that sluiceway for the pathological imagination?"

"Opium, more than alcohol."

"Why the peculiar, relentless pessimism of the *City of Dreadful Night?*"

"Alcohol, and some opium."

"Why some of the words unnatural, tortured, of the *Hound of Heaven* and *Sister Songs?*"

"Laudanum."

"Why the jerk of light and color and flex of motion, the sudden terrible sounds in *Christabel?*"

"Laudanum,—somewhat."

Once we set ourselves to the study of it, the part which narcotics play in the chemistry of minds develops strangely before the eyes. Here is the mathematics of delirium, equations whose solutions are insanity and death. Always our best boasted civilization breaks down in finer issues. Habit, custom,—they palliate many brutalities and most tragedies. And until mankind has toiled up the steep way on which bad habits are retrieved and good put in their place, until the popular mind has enlarged its definition of disease to include narcomanias, as well as other types of insanity, and has stopped the time-wasting business of condemnation, we shall look on such spectacles of disaster as the crippling of Poe, James Thomson, Swinburne, Francis Thompson, and many other poets, content to let human and spiritual waste be a part of our civilization. But one who serves society rather than himself, as the man or woman of genius does, deserves at the cost of society to be shielded from those harms (himself included) to which he is peculiarly vulnerable. Otherwise we must make up our minds to sacrifice and

waste a large portion of those spiritual and intellectual riches of the highly sensitized genius, which lie often almost upon the asylum steps.

To know too much about the neural etiology of words, the etiology of the imagination, is to lose many a so-called masterpiece, many a so-called priceless poem. It is to pick words up and to hold them dangling in mid-air while their nerve reflexes are tested and they are put through a sort of drug Binet-Simon test. It is to strive for and possibly to achieve a new and stricter standard of health in the organic speech both of prose and poetry, it is to cast out narcotized words, and narcotized structures and narcotized visions, and to demand that framework and flesh be sound and wholesome and that the eyes of the soul that look out be not the Medusean eyes of narcotics.

The full purport of the question comes home slowly. The vital problem is this: Is drug mentality to set a standard for English poetry and prose? Is drug imagination to be the matrix on which we shape the imaginative powers? If it is, then that puts a premium on drug addiction. If it is not, then we must cease to hold the *Confessions* up to youth as a model of eloquent English, and several well-known poems to childhood as proper food for the child's imaginative hunger to feed upon. If normality is to be our standard for childhood and adolescence, then it follows that the

"shaping powers of imagination" have their part in that growth as well as personality, character, the training of the mind and body. This conclusion, one way or another, is inescapable. One way it means a revision of our list of so-called "classics" by the help of the literary alienist or pathologist. The other way it means a clear-eyed acceptance of the abnormal, of the diseased, of the morbid, as pacemaker in what we call our best literary achievements.

Do not assert, as if there were some demoniacal logic in it, that Coleridge and De Quincey were geniuses and ate opium. Chaucer, Milton and Wordsworth, Blake, George Eliot, and Robert Browning, were geniuses and they did *not* take opium. That sanity, balance of thought and form in expression must ever be part of the Anglo-Saxon ideal for poetry and prose admits of no discussion. Such law have our greatest always revealed. Foreign to the English habit of mind is that racial Celtic ecstasy which swings the word away from the reality and tosses it lilylike in white passion towards heaven. And ever foreign, too, must be the enslavement of our poetry and prose by the Dark Angel of Opium.

VI

CONFESSIONS PRO AND CON

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CONFESSIONS PRO AND CON

"Their battle, their loss, their ache,
For my pledge of vitality know."

GEORGE MEREDITH.

THERE is the type of unthinking person—usually the moralist—who attempts to prove that the line of life is a straight line because the line of conduct should be. When he comes upon any of the curves or the crazy swirls in what is really the line of life, he becomes eloquent on the subject of "lack of balance," extends his phrase to include "bad habits," and steps over gracefully and righteously into the use of the word "dissipation." After that the transition from the use of "narcomaniac" to "dope fiend" is no effort at all.

It is not possible to say that the effects of alcohol or opium or both would be exactly thus and so. Their influence, singly or together, would largely depend on the physical constitution and the mental texture of the human being who took them. Abnormality may be produced either by alcohol or opium, but in such natures as Poe and Francis Thompson it may precede

the use of either. It is not possible to lump narcomania under a general heading of insanity, although it is related to various forms of insanity. Sometimes socially acceptable diseases (as, for example, epilepsy in the case of Swinburne) are used as whitewash for narcotism or narcomania.

Too heavy an account for narcotism is run up in charging to that what should be charged to other poisons. For example: De Quincey took opium. Popularly he is supposed to be the classic example of so-called "opium-eating." De Quincey's own conclusions with regard to the values of opium have been generally accepted by a public easily fascinated and easily repelled and largely ignorant of the facts of the case. The very word "Confessions" is intriguing. And add to that "of an English Opium-Eater," and there, ready-to-hand, lies one of the most powerful electromagnetic titles in the whole range of literature, —a title certain to draw all to the book.

But surely, the reader insists, a sensitive, educated man who took opium should know the effects of it, the values of it. With respect for its posited accuracy, the average reader accepts this famous passage from the *Confessions:* "I say that opium, or any agent of equal power, is entitled to assume that it was revealed to man for some higher object than that it should furnish a target for moral denunciations, ignorant

where they are not hypocritical, childish where not dishonest; that it should be set up as a theatrical scarecrow for superstitious terrors, of which the *result* is oftentimes to defraud human suffering of its readiest alleviation."

Indeed, *the* classic and eloquent argument in favor of the use of opium! Nevertheless a simple question shows not only how valueless may be the untested conclusions of the public but also even the experienced conclusions of the opium-eater himself. De Quincey wrote in this famous book, "My daily ration was eight thousand drops." A few pages further on he spoke of his daily ration as "having fallen spontaneously from a varying quantity of eight, ten, or twelve thousand drops of laudanum to about three hundred." From these statements, which must have been more or less accurate, it is safe to conclude that De Quincey took from a pint to a pint and a half of laudanum, or the alcoholic tincture of opium, a day. In De Quincey's time, and even now in England, laudanum was a favorite opiate for the narcotist.

But here is the simple question which unravels many complexities: What is the chemical composition of laudanum, the so-called tincture of opium? Laudanum is 10% opium and 90% pure alcohol. One pint of laudanum would equal in alcohol content about one quart of whiskey. That is he took the equivalent in

alcohol content of from one quart to a quart and a half of whiskey a day. Assuredly De Quincey mistook the laudanum label for opium content. What he consumed in those so-called dosages of opium was the minimum dose of opium and the maximum dose of alcohol. . . .

De Quincey's egotism was constitutional, but it was stimulated by alcohol. Opium increases the feminine, recessive traits of personality. It is not only that opium inhibits sexuality, but it also turns all aggressive or outward-moving traits of temperament into those which move inward. It may heighten certain qualities of the imagination and other mental traits, but it obstructs the power to act. Along the line of action the opium-addicted becomes misleading because incapable of normal social activity; furtive because imprisoned by inhibitions he cannot understand, and self-disparaging on account of condemnation by a society which understands him even less than he can explain himself to himself.

On the other hand the egotism which alcohol heightens, flames up with sudden—sometimes unsteady—flare. Oversexuality is one of the ways alcoholism expresses itself and also in an insistent egotism as marked aggressively as it is unbalanced. This boastfulness we find in De Quincey's *Confessions*. Among other things he boasted of knowing everything about opium when all the time the inflation which made him

boast came from alcohol, of the presence of which in opium, so far as is known, he was not aware.

From intoxication comes superpower. This is not saying that the power is serviceable,—although in many cases it might be. In the destructive expressions of intoxication, power of a sort is heightened, is released. But it is of no use. This tendency on the part of human beings to intoxicate themselves—even to the point of wrecking themselves—may lie deeper in some biologic intention than we realize. There is in human nature—indeed in most forms of animal life—what might be called a general intoxication instinct. It is not possible to go so far back in history but that there are found records of the use of intoxicants. And on almost any summer day wasps and other insects can be seen dazed but still sucking the juice of some fermented pear or apple. What the wasp experiences may be one thing; what we experience may be a thing altogether different, but the instinct we share in common.

To what we do not and cannot understand we immediately assign explanations based on ignorance. This plays into our wish to be omniscient and it also evades—somewhat—our fear of the unknown. Alcohol makes a man boastful; opium does not; alcohol is loquacious; opium is most often silent; alcohol inflates courage and hostilities and sex impulses; opium deflates courage and mutes sex impulses. Yet self-dis-

trust or any one of several kinds of feebleness may precede the use of opium rather than follow it. The influence of alcohol has a tendency to develop the sensual in expression of love. The influence of opium tends to fine down the physical aspects of love till they are nonexistent,—as indeed the sex instinct is likely to become.

Whenever we have phantasmagoria as the result of alcohol, it is usually phantasmagoric sensuality. The imagery of alcohol is always more sensual than opium. Perhaps this is one reason why alcohol can retain structure in an art whereas opium dissipates it. For structure must have emphasis on form, physique. The pictures done by alcoholics are likely to be sharp and distinct and to have solemnity and weight. Structure under the influence of alcohol will be clear but exaggerated; under the influence of opium it becomes kaleidoscopic. If it exists at all it is fantastic, blurred. Opium makes for broken structures and inconsistent endings; there are found under its influence shifting and drag of attack, of plan, purpose, setting, character. Alcohol deepens pessimism—can even create it—whereas the gay fantastic quality of work narcotized through opium is often marked. In James Thomson, however, we may say that the sense of sinister destiny was created by alcohol or we may say that the background of his family life gave rise to it.

Secretiveness is one of the legendary stigmata of opium addiction. Poe had it; De Quincey did not have it. This is a single example of the fact that those who rely on alcohol will shout lustily in praise of John Barleycorn; whereas those who take opium will for social reasons hide the fact. . . . However, narcomania either of alcohol or opium is as often truthful as untruthful. It all depends on the human nature under the addiction. With opium we have created the impression of an endless drag of time. This may be largely the influence of the drug or it may be—as in Coleridge's case—some phenomenal delicacy of hearing easily deranged. It is necessary to distinguish carefully between unusual endowment and the effect of opium on the auditory nerve.

Under the influence of opium what is beautiful is almost never natural. The pathologic imagination is more shaped by opium than by alcohol. Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* is a famous illustration of what is meant. Opium reveals tortured sensitiveness to light, to odors, to sound. Although opium is often silent, its effect may show itself in explosive screams, cries, groans, as, for example, in *Christabel.* At certain stages alcohol and opium share in common phantasmagoria of color, odor, light, sound and hallucination, but with very different detail.

If a distinction might be made in the influence of

alcohol and the influence of opium on words, I think it might be said that alcohol makes for vacancy, opium for strangeness. There is, by way of illustration, the resounding emptiness of Swinburne's poetry—music in which is no thought, beautiful words having no significance. In the matter of words opium results in a decadent search for the strange. This is not true of alcohol. The effect of opium is what might be called "circling,"—a sort of overlapping of words, of phrases, of lines, which creates the impression of flow in motion, of a whirling current and its return. In processes of thinking it might be described as an effect of delirium and its unreality; in sound it suggests echo.

But the problem is still further complicated by other factors. At thirty-nine years of age De Quincey's father died of tuberculosis and one sister of tuberculous meningitis. De Quincey himself gives us in various passages a more or less detailed account of his own tuberculous condition. Here is one: "Without something like a miracle in my favor, I was instructed to regard myself a condemned subject. . . . These opinions were pronounced by the highest authorities in Christendom. . . . Out of eight children I was the one who most closely inherited the bodily conformation of a father who had died of consumption at the early age of thirty-nine. . . . I offered at the first glance to a medical eye every symptom of phthisis broadly

and conspicuously developed. The hectic colors in the face, the nocturnal perspirations, the growing embarrassment of the respiration, and other expressions of gathering feebleness under any attempts at taking exercise, all these symptoms were steadily accumulating between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-four." As far as De Quincey's father was concerned, even if the reader rightly refused to believe that the acquired characteristic of a parent could be transmitted to the child, nevertheless it would be difficult to prove that it was without influence.

Not only is it necessary to ask about the chemical composition of laudanum, it is evident that it becomes necessary to ask another sort of question,—not "Is it Drugs and Genius?" but "Is it Germs and Genius?" There is a point at which most toxemias meet and at that point we get somewhat the same results from them all. To make a study like this which should be adequate, it would take a good "bedside man," a biochemist, an artist and several other trained social servants.

The significance of the *spes phthisica*—the psychical quickening—found in poets and writers of known tuberculous taint requires more than a second thought to comprehend. It would not do, for example, to conclude that the invariable effect of a disease of the body shows itself in mental ways that are equally diseased. With the tuberculous at least such is not the case.

In Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* it is doubtful whether the flight of his song and the tumult of wind and leaves would have been so swift without the quickening which Shelley had from tuberculosis. In the case of Emily Brontë, life may have been shortened physically by consumption, but study convinces the reader that psychically in *Wuthering Heights* and in her poems power and passion were made the greater by the *spes phthisica.*

Nature is a wise economist and has in view her own disease-compensations. Keats's mother died of tuberculosis as did also his brother Tom who was nursed by the poet. In two years Keats produced many poems —enough to fill a bulky volume—which will make his name known and loved as long as English poetry is read. *Spes Phthisica?* Elizabeth Barrett Browning had trouble with the lungs and at the age of thirty-one a hemorrhage. For a long period Robert Louis Stevenson fought tuberculosis. In his search for health he made the world his debtor by many volumes of the most delightful travels ever written. But biographical study of Stevenson's life shows that when he was in improved condition his literary output was least. Only one conclusion is possible: that he missed the psychical excitation of disease. In American literary annals Poe, Thoreau, Emerson, Lanier, are four famous illustrations of the tuberculous taint. Here are but a

few of those many special studies which might be made. The closer the study of the illustrations the firmer grows the conviction that however much the physical life may be shortened by tuberculosis, there is acceleration, speeding-up of the mental processes.

There is a point, in short, at which toxemias meet. At that point somewhat the same results come from them all. And when toxemias mingle—as they do, for example, in the cases of De Quincey, Edgar Allan Poe and James Thomson—the student studies the data with care and is slow to draw conclusions. It is possible to interpret much of Poe's harmless philandering and some of the poems by saying that he was sexually dead. If *The Raven* should be interpreted in the light of yearning for a normal sexual life with his young wife, the snapshot conclusion upon which one rushes is that his opium addiction (laudanum, too, in Poe's case) had killed normal sex impulse. Under ordinary conditions laudanum, because of the large alcoholic content, would not do that. But other toxemias, too, were at work in him. He was overworked, he was underfed, he was tuberculous. The probability is that, at least over a certain period, opium, slowing up oxidation, conserved his energy. To himself as to others, there must have been seasons when he seemed not only to recover vitality, but also to increase it, for opium is at points an amplifier of physical as

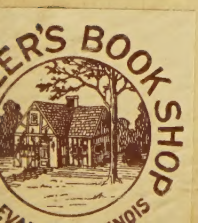
well as mental traits. In so far as he was underfed it was a boon to him. Opium taken within bounds lessens gastric secretions. Men who starve, whether because of hard economic conditions or the effect of disease, find in it a blessing.

Opium has its place in the pharmacopeia under the direction of trained physicians and nurses. And they, even if the public cannot, have the wisdom to distinguish between narcotisms and narcomanias, between the morphinist and the morphinomaniac. They know that sovereignty does not belong to opium if there has been no overdosing. Better trained and more discriminating than the laymen they do not presuppose that every case is an overdose case; nor in extreme cases—narcomanias—do they place the whole burden of blame on the narcotic. The condition of toxemia is almost never simple: it is almost always complex. The thought of the microbic shaping of our lives is common scientific thinking to-day. To the end of the question must remain whether such studies as these should not be called *Germs and Genius* rather than *Drugs and Genius.*

In conclusion, a society which casts stones at a Poe or a James Thomson is no higher, biologically speaking, than the doe which seeks to drown her fawn because it is blind. Nor can a society which fails to analyze the content of laudanum or to gauge the relative

effects of opium and alcohol on a De Quincey be considered, however "moral," intelligent to any high degree. With widespread public education along the lines of drug addiction and alcoholism such cheap, smart descriptions of Poe's work as "Hawthorne and delirium tremens" would become impossible, for the simple reason that narcomania and alcoholism would not seem any more amusing than cancer to an age which is trying to understand them scientifically,—their reasons for existence, their "compensations," the suffering which they cause, and the social and economic losses which they bring about.

THE END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